

An interview with Edris Bennett

EDRIS BENNETT

An Interview Conducted by  
Jayne Lloyd  
June 27, 1981

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NARRATOR DATA SHEET

Name of narrator: Mrs. Edris (Clyde) Steventon Bennett  
Address: 901 South 8th St., Terre Haute, Indiana Phone: 235-7434  
Birthdate: January 16, 1896 Birthplace: Terre Haute, Indiana  
Length of residence in Terre Haute: 86 years  
Education: Musical training: Miss Blanche Rippetoe & Miss Anna Hylman,  
piano; Amelia Meyer, keyboard theory.  
Occupational history: Private piano teacher, voice coach and  
keyboard theory coach, accompanist.  
  
  
  
Special interests, activities, etc. Altrusa Service Club  
(has been editor of Altrusa Bulletin for a number of  
years).  
  
Major subject(s) of interview: 1) Growing up in Terre Haute  
2) Musical training & career years  
3) Overview of Terre Haute performing scene in early 1900s.  
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<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Interviewer</u>
June 27, 1981		Mrs. Bennett's home	Jayne Lloyd

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EDRIS BENNETT

Tape 1

June 27, 1981

At Mrs. Bennett's home -- 901 South 8th St., Terre Haute, IN

INTERVIEWER: Jayne Lloyd

TRANSCRIBER: Kathleen M. Skelly

For: Vigo County Oral History Program

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JL: My name is Jayne Lloyd and I'm at the home of Mrs. Edris Bennett at 901 South 8th Street. We're doing an oral history interview. Today is June 27, 1981.

Mrs. Bennett, first I'm going to ask you some questions about your birthplace, your mother and father, and your education and we'll get some brief answers. Then we'll enlarge on those areas with some questions about your early childhood.

Where were you born?

BENNETT: I was born in Terre Haute.

JL: Where?

BENNETT: Well, it was at 15th and Mahan Avenue. Mahan Avenue was a little street just about two blocks long that started at 17th Street, went up over the railroad and down to the canal. The canal was the west end of Mahan Avenue.

JL: O.K. We'll get back to that in just a second.

What was your mother's name?

BENNETT: Her name was Laura Belle Williams.

JL: Where was she from?

BENNETT: She was from Perintown, Ohio, Clermont County.

JL: And your father?

BENNETT: My father was born at Boonton, New Jersey.

JL: And his name?

BENNETT: His name was William Ernest Steventon.

JL: That's . . .

BENNETT: T-o-n (laughs) It isn't Stevenson; that was always bad when people said Stevenson because (continuing to laugh) our name was Steventon.

JL: O.K. You were educated in Terre Haute. Where did you go to school?

BENNETT: Well, my first school -- the first grade -- was at Cottage Place. The school was a four-room frame building at 21st and Washington Avenue. It was built there about 1900, I think, or 1903 to take the overflow from the old Montrose School at 17th and Dean. The old Montrose school was a brick, two-story building and they had two cottages which took care of the first and second grade. So many pupils were beginning to come that they decided to build this Cottage Place school at 21st and Washington. And that's where I entered the first grade.

JL: You went there until the end of the second grade?

BENNETT: No. I went there until I had gone through the 6th year. We were in the township and my father paid tuition for us to go to the city school. Then Harrison Township decided to furnish transportation for students who lived over a mile from Sugar Grove. And, of course, we lived over a mile from Sugar Grove. And this transportation was a bus. We called it the kid wagon. It was a hack with canvas curtains that rolled up and down and it held about, oh, probably 25 children. There were steps on the back and steps at the front where the driver sat.

It was driven first by a Mr. John Butler.

BENNETT: Then and not very long afterward, a Will Klatte got the job of driving the kid wagon and held it until the township changed that plan.

So we went then to Sugar Grove. And I entered Sugar Grove in the 6th grade.

JL: Did you stay . . . how many years were you at Sugar Grove?

BENNETT: Well, it was in the fall of 1906 when we went out there. We went the full year and then up until Christmas, or New Year's 1907, and that . . . no, now wait.

JL: Mrs. Bennett, you were saying that you began Sugar Grove in 1906; how long were you there?

BENNETT: We entered in September, 1906, went around the full year and then the new Thornton school at 29th and College was being completed. At New Year's, 1908, we left Sugar Grove and -- about half of the student body and three of our teachers -- went to Thornton school. The township discontinued the use of the kid wagon and closed the two upper rooms of Sugar Grove. There were just the two lower rooms left with a new principal /Miss Nell Novotney/ and with the primary teacher /Miss Anna Ripley/.

JL: O.K. Let's back up and go /back/ to those years at the Cottage Place and the neighborhood that you grew up in. Tell me about that neighborhood and about your father's job . . . your recollections.

BENNETT: My father sold fruit and vegetables from a wagon. We would have to back up still more and this takes us back to the name Mahan. Mahan Avenue was named for Mr. Leonard H. Mahan, who lived at what would be Idaho and 17th. He was quite a

BENNETT: landowner. He owned big farms and grew all kinds of produce. He had orchards; he had huge strawberry fields; he employed possibly 25 people who worked on these holdings. And much . . . he had greenhouses, two greenhouses on the west of 17th and five, I believe on the . . . no, two on the east of 17th and about five on the west side. He grew lettuce and shipped the lettuce in barrels to Chicago. There was a spur off the railroad there for the things that he would send to Chicago.

I remember how when the car was loaded, someone would write "L. H. Mahan" on . . . in white chalk. That always made us feel so important when we saw (commences to laugh) a boxcar go along with "L. H. Mahan" written on it 'cause we knew . . . we knew where it came from.

JL: Now, did you know Mr. Mahan yourself?

BENNETT: Yes. Um hm.

JL: Well, how did your father come to go to the home on Mahan Avenue?

BENNETT: Well, when . . . first though, we'll back up again. As I told you, my father was born at Boonton, New Jersey. My grandfather was a nailer; he worked in a big nail mill there at Boonton. My grandmother died when my father was 12 years old. A brother-in-law of grandpa was in Terre Haute working at the old nail mill here, and he wrote and asked grandfather /to/ bring the children and come to Terre Haute, that he could have a good job in the nail mill. They made good money when they weren't on strike. The nailers made very good money but they struck about two-thirds of the (commences to laugh) time. So they came to Terre Haute and there were /four/ children: my Aunt Alice, my Uncle Harry, and Aunt Flora, who was 3, and then my father. That would make four children.

BENNETT: They boarded at the Prairie House which is now the site, of course, of the Terre Haute House. They boarded there until grandpa found a nice home place where they could board and that was with a woman by the name of Dorsey. The Dorseys were rather prominent people. /They included a Will Dorsey and a Miss Clementine Dorsey who was an early librarian./ I believe that they were rolling mill people.

JL: What do you mean "rolling mill"?

BENNETT: Well, Mr. Andrew Crawford owned a rolling mill in which . . . well, I don't know enough about it to explain it intelligently, but metal was rolled in great sheets and shipped wherever they would be needing metal for . . . oh, for anything in building and all. And the nail mill was right close. I rather think it must have been next to the rolling mill, but I think it was a separate organization. I don't think Mr. Crawford was connected with the nail mill.

JL: Tell me again where the nail mill was located.

BENNETT: Well, as near as I can say from what I've heard as a child, it must have been about Crawford Street and the railroad. That was the Evansville and Terre Haute Railroad that later became the C & E I /Chicago and Eastern Illinois/. But it was around Poplar or Crawford there where the railroad makes quite a curve as it goes on its south way you know. It has quite a curve there and I think that it goes south straight from about Crawford Street on.

JL: O.K. Let's just stop here for a second and then we'll get back to your father's work in the nail mill.

You say that they boarded with a family by the name of Dorsey. Was this a boarding house?

BENNETT: No, no, I don't think so. I think it was a private home but she kept boarders. People like . . . she kept boarders. There were railroad men and from the rolling mill, yet it was . . . well, it was just a big, private home.

JL: The reason I asked that is that you rarely hear of a boarding house or a place that has room for boarders in this day and age. And that has always fascinated me and I was curious to hear. Do you have any idea what your family paid to stay there?

BENNETT: No. I wouldn't have any idea.

JL: O.K. Well, let's . . .

BENNETT: None whatever.

JL: Let's go on to his /your father's/ coming here and staying with the Dorseys and the work at the nail mill. What transpired then?

BENNETT: Yes. Well, now when my father was 14, my grandfather remarried. He married a Mrs. /Sarah/ Patrick. She was a widow and her husband had had a large grocery in his day and I think the grocery was down about 5th and Ohio. I think it was the same building that later was owned by a /grocer/ by the name of Morris.

JL: He was 14 years old?

BENNETT: Yes. My father was 14. She was willing to take Uncle Harry, who was 11, and Aunt Flora, who then would be 5. She had a daughter who was about, oh, 10 years old. But she didn't want to take care of a 14-year-old boy so she refused to let my father be part of the family. So grandpa took him down to Mr. Mahan, who had these big gardens and holdings that way. Mr. Mahan had been a



BENNETT: captain in the Civil War and had lost an arm. I think it was the left arm. He was a very gentlemanly man. I never saw him in my life but what he was dressed up with a white shirt and a little black string tie they called it, tied in a little bow in the front. I never saw him in overalls or, you might say, common clothes. He always was dressed with a white shirt and black tie.

His wife was a former schoolteacher. She was Miss Lydia Harvey . . . no, not Harvey. Lydia Hardy, h-a-r-d-y. And they were very cultured people, very nice and cultured people. Grandpa took my father to them and they just took him into their home, just treated him as one of the family. My father was a very studious boy. He loved reading and they were great readers. There was much good companionship that way. He stayed with them until he was 18.

JL: Did he work for Mr. Mahan during those years?

BENNETT: Yes. He worked . . . he helped there on the place and went to school. He went to school there at 12th and Ohio, the Thompson School. Then he had his chores, you know, to do there on the place which he did. This was something (chuckles). The first paycheck that he had, or rather just the pay for his first month's work, grandpa appeared on the scene and wanted to collect it. And Mr. Mahan said, no, indeed, he said, the boy's a good worker and he has done his work well. He said, "I'm saving his money and banking it for him." He said, "I won't let you have his pay."

So that was the way it was. Mr. Mahan, too, had him . . . oh, he had him take produce and sell it. You know take it to the groceries and sell to people on the side. Then a Mr. Harry Graham, who lived at 16th and Dean, had greenhouses there at 17th and Dean. He was the head of the park board.

BENNETT: So he and Mr. Mahan were sort of buddies in their work. He had my father take geraniums at Decoration Day after they had fixed up all the flower beds in the parks and all, which my father did. He would have him take the remaining geraniums in the wagon and sell them, peddle them out to people. It was in that and in the produce that Mr. Mahan had him sell that let my father see that there was a good living and good future with anyone selling produce that way from a wagon.

He talked it over with Mr. Mahan and Mr. Mahan encouraged him in that. Well, they . . . and then he worked at the nail mill besides. He was grandpa's apprentice at the nail mill. But he grew tired of the strikes. There would be . . .

JL: Tell us something about those strikes.

BENNETT: Well, all I know is just what they told me; that is, my mother said they would work a week and the pay was good and then they'd be on a strike. And I don't know what the strike was for; I don't know if it was a matter of wages or what. I couldn't say, but it seemed as though they were just practically always on a strike.

And so he had had this experience of selling the flowers and selling the produce. Let me see . . . my father was 24 when he and my mother married. So he talked it over with Mr. Mahan and Mr. Mahan said, "Well, Billy, you're wise. There is a good living in that. I'll help you this way. I'll give you a horse and wagon and you can pay me for it later as you begin to get on your feet in this. Just take that horse and wagon there and just start out." And he did.

He sold to all the nice streets here in town -- South 5th, 6th, and 7th and 8th and 9th. He knew what to get that the people wanted. The customers . . . he had a high grade of customers

BENNETT: and so many of them would want the nice, exotic fruits, if they were going to have a big dinner, a big party or anything. Those he got at the commission house.

JL: Where was that?

BENNETT: Well, the commission house was at 10th and Wabash.

JL: What does that mean, commission house?

BENNETT: Well, the building was a former inn on the canal there at 10th and Wabash. Then the canal, of course, went out of existence, and Mr. Charles Goldsmith had a commission house.

Now I don't know how the word commission enters into that, but it was fine fruits and vegetables. You could get oranges, bananas, grapes, pineapples, those things you see there. The grocers would get their exotic fruits from the commission house. And my father, he . . . well, he had sold produce from Mr. Mahan's place and then from the gardeners who came in from Prairieton. /Some of their names were: Bill Pollitt, Ivan Morris, Millard Smith, Lyman Durham, a Wible and a Bloksom./ They'd come in during the night /about 1:30 a.m./ and back up /their wagons along the curb/ at the courthouse, and the peddlers could go down and get their produce for the day.

So he did that. Then he went to the commission house and got the fruit. Then he started the route for the day at St. Benedict's church. His very first stop was the priest's house.

JL: At what time of the day?

BENNETT: Well, about 6 o'clock in the morning.

JL: About what time did he finish?

BENNETT: About 4 in the afternoon.

JL: That was 5 days a week?

BENNETT: No, it was 6 days a week. You see he started on Monday and ended on Saturday evening.

He had an old, fat horse by the name of "Billy." And Billy was so nice and slow. (laughs) He was trained so well; Billy knew where to go just the same as my father did. My father would take the vegetables around to the back door, you know, and when he came back, he'd say, "All right, Billy." And Billy would just move up to the next house and stop. And they were just regular pals. (laughs heartily)

JL: Tell me . . . I'm just curious so we can get an idea of the difference between a week's wages then and a week's wages now. Do you have any idea of what your father might have brought home on a good week?

BENNETT: Yes, I think I can. Now there was a time there when a day's wages was a dollar, a dollar a day was . . . if a man had a steady job at a dollar a day, he could do pretty well with good management.

Well, I remember one week when my father's profit on Saturday was \$23, just on Saturday.

JL: And that was profit? That's after he had paid off his debt?

BENNETT: Yes. That was profit.

And then the next week, the profit on Saturday was \$19, and he was quite downcast by it because he had made \$23 the week before. My mother said, "Why Will, you've made more today than most men make in

BENNETT: two weeks at a dollar a day." Well, he never seemed . . . he hadn't thought of that. (laughs)

But I don't know just what you could say for the week. Saturday was a big day. That's when the ladies ordered things, you know, for the weekend. They were going to have company and all like that and that was the big day. But the other days were all good days, too.

JL: What about the other peddlers in town? Were they his friends?

BENNETT: Oh, yes. There were some by the name of House. There were several of the House family /Irvin, Andy, Mack, Hiram and Lewis/, and they were all peddlers. And Fred Kautz was a peddler and, oh, then there were peddlers that came from down Prairieton way, too.

JL: But they were peddlers as opposed to the farmers from Prairieton who brought their produce in?

BENNETT: Yes. Um hm. As far as I can see.

JL: How did the grocers around Terre Haute feel about the peddlers? Were they competitors?

BENNETT: Well, yes. They were. Now of course, the big thing that they were resentful of -- and you couldn't blame them -- was the peddlers' produce was always fresh when they got it in the morning there from these gardeners. And the poor grocers would . . . their produce would wilt. You see they'd have a basketful of mustard greens or things of that kind out in front of their store, and in a couple of days it would be so wilted. There wasn't anything to do about it. And, of course, they resented the fact that the peddlers had fresh produce always.

BENNETT: Now some of the peddlers didn't bother to get the fresh every day. And my father had studied the matter over; each day had its particular line that he would know just about what everyone was going to have, and he would buy accordingly. And by the end of the day, there was very little left over to wilt, very little.

JL: Did he bring that home to his family?

BENNETT: Yes. We had plenty of nice, fresh things. And any orange that got a little speck on it or a banana that was beginning to turn a little black, that was put in the deck at the top. My brother and I -- my brother was two years younger than I -- we would run to meet Pop. We'd run up -- we didn't dare go farther than Hulman Street -- but we'd go up along the canal, and we'd climb on the wagon and climb right up and put our hands up in the deck and, sure enough, there would be a nice ripe banana or an orange with a speck on it. (laughs heartily)

JL: You said you climbed up the canal. What state was the canal in at this time?

BENNETT: Oh, it was . . . it was just an old depression.

JL: Just a ditch?

BENNETT: Uh-huh, just a ditch. And when the Southern Indiana Railroad came in in 1900, the right of way was laid right in the canal. I remember just a little bit of the canal that I could see along the railroad bank. It was about three feet deep perhaps. And in rainy weather or in the winter when there was a lot of melting snow, there was quite a bit of water in there about three feet deep and it would freeze over and we could go skating on our shoes. (laughs)

JL: Mrs. Bennett, you grew up near a railroad and I'm sure you saw your share of . . . you had to have seen some hobos . . .

BENNETT: Oh, yes.

JL: . . . maybe riding the boxcars. I'm interested in knowing something about those men.

BENNETT: Well, there were tramps and there were hobos. (laughs)

JL: What's the difference?

BENNETT: There was quite a distinction it seems. A tramp was just a . . . oh, he was just, you might say, no good at all. And a hobo was a fellow who was down on his luck, looking for a job, and the hobos rode between the boxcars. They would get on the bumpers between the boxcars and some of those poor fellows were there in the coldest weather. We'd see the train go along and the hobos there on the bumpers. There were a lot of railroad men who were very kindly to the hobos. They'd throw open an empty boxcar and when the train would stop at a switch or something of that kind, they'd run back and tell 'em, "Get up here in this boxcar. You don't want to freeze to death." And they . . . that went on a great deal.

Then the tramp was always one who was also down on his luck but didn't try very much to remedy the situation.

JL: Well, how could you tell the difference? Just from looking?

BENNETT: Well, yes. The hobo was a respectable fellow and they might have to be by a campfire in the night for they could burn ties. And the . . .

JL: Railroad ties?

- BENNETT: Yes. And sleep, you know, where it was warm there, but they seemed to be able to shave. You didn't see them unshaven. They always had some way of coming up looking pretty nice. And the tramp went without shaving and so forth.
- JL: Well, in those days before the Salvation Army, those people were welcome really in homes if they came to your door and asked for food. They were given food, weren't they?
- BENNETT: Um hm. Yes. Many. There were a lot of people who just wouldn't have anything to do with them whatever. But my mother always had an extra place on the table. There were the places for us and then there was one in case some poor fellow was needing a meal. And she always judged by how clean he was and how he looked, you know, as to whether he could come in and eat at the table or if he was on the tramp variety, he could sit on the back step. (laughs) But he always got a good, hot meal just the same. She never turned anyone down.
- JL: Well, tell me some other stories about the railroad . . . your recollections of the C & E I railroad. That was close by?
- BENNETT: Yes.
- JL: All your brothers worked there, did they not?
- BENNETT: Well, no, my brothers worked on the Southern Indiana.
- JL: I see.
- BENNETT: The one that came in . . . it came in to Terre Haute in 1900 and they had a roundhouse at Hulman Street there, which is still there. It just fronts right on Hulman Street. There was a turntable there to turn the engines, you know, and let them



BENNETT: run in on the correct track that they would be stationed for. I believe they had ten stalls. Now I may be wrong in that now, but it seems to me that there were 10 stalls that . . . that would mean that they could house 10 engines. Then the hostlers would have their work of cleaning them up and polishing the brass and . . .

JL: What were the hostlers?

BENNETT: A hostler, well, he would be like a groom for a horse. He groomed the engines, you see. He had these helpers and my brother Harry . . . well, now let me see. My brother Seth was 16 and Harry was 14, and, oh, they just loved the railroad. They loved to go up to the roundhouse and they were well-behaved kids and had respect for property and treated things right and the men liked them. And the men did a lot of nice things for them. They encouraged Seth to take up air brake. Now Seth was 16; he'd had two years at Wiley High school and this was a chance for him to learn air brake.

JL: Which is what?

BENNETT: Well, all I can say is the . . . it's a brake applied from the engine with . . . oh, I don't know what it would be, but the engineer can put on the air or take off the air, you know, and it means that the whole train would be braked there with the air. Don't you know how you would hear when the cars would stop and you would hear them go "sssssszzzz"? Well, that's the air brake. You see before air brake came on, there was just the hand brake, the little wheels on a vertical standard. That was like on the end of the boxcars and the coal cars. The brakesman had to do that by hand, go and turn that wheel, run on to the next car, turn that wheel, and it was a job and especially in bad weather. It was just awfully bad. Later the air brake came on and I don't know who invented

BENNETT: it or anything but it was controlled at the engine.  
/It was a Westinghouse product./

JL: This was one of your brothers who learned this  
air brake?

BENNETT: Um hm, that was Seth.

JL: Did he stay with that kind of work?

BENNETT: He became a railroad engineer. He was promot-  
ed to be an engineer when he was 21.

JL: Did that become his life's work?

BENNETT: Yes. He was an engineer 49 years.

JL: Do you remember any of his stories about being  
an engineer on the railroads in Terre Haute?

BENNETT: Oh, well, now it wasn't at Terre Haute that  
he was an engineer. He went over to the Big Four  
/CCC & St. L -- Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland &  
St. Louis/ in southern Illinois and worked from  
Danville to Cairo.

JL: Did you ever get to . . . were these passenger  
trains?

BENNETT: Oh, some were and some were not.

JL: Did you ever get to ride on one of the trains  
on which he was engineer?

BENNETT: I certainly did! (laughs)

JL: What was . . . tell us about that.

BENNETT: Well, when I was 18, which was in 1914, and  
on the 14th of December, I went down to visit Seth  
and his wife at Mount Carmel. Mount Carmel was 90

BENNETT: miles south of Paris on the Big Four. I didn't know that this would be Seth's train.

JL: Excuse me just a minute. How did you get to Mount Carmel from Terre Haute? Did you go by horse and wagon or car or what . . .

BENNETT: You mean generally?

JL: No, when you went for that trip?

BENNETT: Oh, no! My youngest brother took me over to Paris on the interurban.

JL: Well, before you tell us about the train trip, tell us about that interurban trip, too. And then about your recollection of that. Was it your first ride?

BENNETT: Oh, no!

JL: Oh, I see!

BENNETT: Oh, no, no. The streetcars had come in, I believe, about 1898. And the interurban was, you know, it was between towns. They were fashioned more like a Pullman car. They were very nice. They were clean and strong and, oh, just fine, smooth riding. As I remember, an interurban sort of compared with a diesel in smoothness. Poor little streetcar bumped up and down. (laughs)

JL: O.K. So you took the interurban to Mount Carmel and then . . .

BENNETT: No. No. We took the interurban to Paris.

JL: To Paris.

BENNETT: And then he carried my suitcase for me from the interurban station over to the Big Four station

BENNETT: which was about six blocks away. It would have been too far for me to carry the heavy suitcase. So when I got on the train, they were waiting a few minutes there and all of a sudden, here came Seth down the aisle in his fireman's suit. He was firing that day instead of running the engine. One of the older men was the engineer on the job and, of course, the younger men then would be set back to firing maybe for the one trip. So he came down the aisle and looking right and left and when he saw me, of course, we had a big hug and kiss, you know, (laughing) right there. And he said, "Now when we get to Flat Rock, you get off and come up to the engine and we'll go over and get our noon meal there. We have 15 minutes when we get to Flat Rock and the lady there serves the lunch."

So when we got to Flat Rock, I got off and went up to the engine and the fireman . . . no, Seth was the fireman. It was the head brakeman had to stay with the engine. You didn't dare leave an engine unattended, so the head brakeman stayed with the engine. Seth and the engineer, who was a big, fat Santa Claus kind of type fellow and his name was Billy Barnes, and then there was the conductor and the rear brakesman, we all went down the bank and up the other bank and across the little highway and there was a house going parallel with the track. /Flat Rock/ was kind of a little stringtown at that time. And this lady gave us some fine chicken and dressing and noodles and pumpkin pie and, oh, just a regular Thanksgiving feast. And that made her a little money every day. Each of the men gave her a dollar.

JL: Now this would have been true for the engineers in Terre Haute as well, would it not? If Seth had worked in Terre Haute as an engineer, at a certain point could he have been fed by someone in a similar way?

BENNETT: I don't know. I think that it did happen occasionally or they would stop where there was a little restaurant or something. But, of course, 'most everyone had their dinner buckets with them. I don't know how it happened, but they had just 15 minutes there to get this noon meal. But they had a long run. It was a long run because they . . . when we got to Mount Carmel, I got off the train there and Seth got right back on the engine and had to go on to Cairo. That was a long, long ride, a long workday, you know. I presume that it must have been permitted that they have a good meal to tide them through 'cause it certainly was a fine meal! (laughs)

JL: Well, Mrs. Bennett, you've also talked about a couple of interesting experiences on streetcars with your family. Could you tell the story about the time you and your family decided to take a trip out to Rose -- Rose Poly?

BENNETT: (commences to laugh) No.

JL: Wasn't it?

BENNETT: No, Rose Poly was at 13th and Locust.

JL: But it's where Rose Poly is today?

BENNETT: Well, Glenn.

JL: Glenn.

BENNETT: Yes, out to Glenn. This was when the streetcars first came in. I was 5 and my little brother was 3. My father said one Sunday afternoon, "Let's go take a streetcar ride." Well, the South 17th line was already in . . . well, they were just making it. And it had come down 13th Street from Wabash to Crawford and hadn't yet gone out Crawford

BENNETT: Street to 17th and on down to Hulman. And so we had to walk. We walked up the railroad to 13th and Crawford, got on the streetcar and got a transfer when we got up at Wabash. You rode for a nickel on the streetcar and if you needed to transfer to another line, they issued a transfer. Some people would spend all Sunday afternoon going from car to car line that way, riding, you know, and always with transfers. So it was very reasonable that way.

So we went out and we were riding in a big old streetcar that was a doubledeck. And it was just loaded with people, upstairs and down. My mother wouldn't go upstairs. She said it looks dangerous to me. She felt it looked top-heavy. So we got in on the first floor. It was rather a large streetcar. It went out past the orphanage at Glenn at that time. And when we got out to the end of the line, the car jumped the track. It began to lean precariously and the people just came off. I remember seeing them come down the ladder. We got off there and so we had to wait. There would be a wrecker come to pull the streetcar back on the track, and then another car came to pick up all these passengers. And they took us back and when we got to Highland Lawn, the car was on fire. (laughs)

JL: (laughs)

BENNETT: There was a little hole right near where I was sitting, and the conductor was down on his knees with a little stick and he was trying to stanch the flame. There was a little, slow flame there, and he was trying to put it out with a little stick. Well, it just didn't work and so they had to get off the streetcar. And we all had to head back to town. There were no more streetcars to come and get us.

BENNETT: And we walked from Highland Lawn back to 13th and Wabash. (laughs)

JL: Whew. And you were 5 years old?

BENNETT: Yes.

JL: That was a long walk.

BENNETT: And my brother was 3 and . . .

JL: Now the whole . . . the whole bunch from the streetcar walked together, right?

BENNETT: Yes, to quite an extent. That way they started out together as far as I can remember but some of them were faster walkers than we, you know, and we were such little kids and my father was not a large man and my mother was not a large woman so they couldn't carry us very much. And they'd carry us a little while and then set us down and so forth. But we had a long trip back to 13th and Wabash.

Well, we were so tired and my father said, "Let's go in the drugstore here and get an ice cream soda." That was what is now Dawson's on the southwest corner of 13th and Wabash. So we went in and that was the first time I was ever in a drugstore. And, oh, it was so interesting, all the pretty things in the pretty boxes, and there was a candy counter and an ice cream counter and all. And on the chairs -- I called them curly legs -- they were . . . they were copper and twisted. You know, twisted legs that way.

JL: Is that what we called the ice cream chair today?

BENNETT: Yes. Uh huh.

JL: It's an antique?

BENNETT: And a little round top table and it had curly legs. I think they had three tables in there. Well, a boy came with a list of refreshments. My mother said, "Well, I'll take a lemon ice cream soda." And my father said, "Well, I'll take vanilla." And it was just Greek to my brother and me, and . . . .

END OF SIDE 1

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BENNETT: Well, as I said, it was just Greek to Jess and me. My youngest brother's name was Jesse. Jesse Leonard. He was named for Mr. Mahan, Leonard Mahan. So I called him Jess.

So we didn't know what they were talking about. And my mother said, "I'll have a lemon ice cream soda," and my father said, "Well, I'll have vanilla." And we didn't know what they meant. Well, they were so amused . . . you know, my parents were so amused and my father looked at me across the table and he said, "Now, Cecie, you can have strawberry or cherry or pineapple or chocolate or nectar . . . ." He just went down the whole list. Well, each sounded so much better than the other and I just couldn't say anything. I just sat there and squirmed.

My father said, "Well, make up your mind." He said, "The boy has to fix these sodas for us. So tell them what you want."

Well, then I took lemon because mommy took lemon. Jess took lemon because I took lemon. So the boy had an order of three lemon ice cream sodas and one vanilla. And when they came, I didn't like the lemon. It tasted like lemon peel, rather bitter. Jess didn't like it. Of course, the carbonated water stung our noses, you know, and Jess



BENNETT: said, "It makes my nose feel like my foot is asleep." (laughs heartily)

JL: Do you have any idea what you paid for those?  
What your parents paid for those?

BENNETT: Five cents.

JL: Five cents apiece.

BENNETT: Uh-huh. Five cents apiece.

JL: At Dawson's drugstore.

BENNETT: And there was a nice big round ball of ice cream in it. At least we had a nice bit of ice cream there.

JL: How did you all get home that night?

BENNETT: Well, we were right at 13th and Wabash where the streetcar turned off Wabash -- the South 17th line -- and we got on there and rode down to 13th and Crawford. That's as far as it went at that time. They were in the process of building the line. So we had to get off and we walked over to the railroad and walked down to Mahan Avenue there. We were so tired. We just threw ourselves across the bed and were fast asleep instantly. My mother just let us sleep. And she woke us about 8 o'clock to get us ready for bed. She wanted to know if we would like some supper and we couldn't even answer her. (laughs) We were so tired that she just let us alone.

There was another thing about the streetcars. The reason that the dilapidated cars were in service there that day, we didn't have the new streetcars yet that had been ordered. You see the lines were just in the process of being made and so these two cars were sent here either from Muncie or . . .

BENNETT: let's see . . . Muncie or . . . oh, the other town . . . Marion, Indiana, who had big streetcar lines. And even at our best we never had large streetcars like they were. They were like Chicago or Cincinnati streetcars.

JL: You mean, for example, there weren't very many doubledecker streetcars from Terre Haute.

BENNETT: There weren't any.

JL: Ah!

BENNETT: No, there were none whatever. They sent this over . . . you might say, they just loaned them to us. And the big car, the one that caught on fire, I've seen its duplicate at Cincinnati on their big lines. But our own cars were smaller, you know. They were fitted to the size of our town and . . . but we had a wonderful streetcar system. They had a series of switches that if you missed a streetcar, say, at 17th and Hulman, if you got there just in time that the car had pulled out and you didn't get it, you knew you would have a car in 9 minutes because at 17th and Crawford there was a switch and the cars would pass on the switches. And it was 9 minutes between each switch.

JL: Now I've heard there were some bad boys who used to kind of goof things up for the streetcar drivers.

BENNETT: Yes, they did.

JL: What did they . . .

BENNETT: They would . . . when the car had stopped to let a passenger off, the big, bad boys would hop on the fender -- there was a fender at each end of the car -- and when they reached the end of the carline the conductor would get off, take the

BENNETT: trolley around and put it at the other end of the car, and push the fender in. It was like a grating, a step that was a grating on the end of the car, and he'd push that in so that it would be smooth. Pull one out on the front end of the car. It would be like what they always called a cowcatcher on a railroad engine.

Now the bad boys would be waiting we'll say on 17th Street there; perhaps they'd be waiting at Washington Avenue, and if the car stopped there to let a passenger off, these boys would hop on the fender and just go right on in. It'd be a summer car; they couldn't do it on a winter car. It was enclosed.

JL: The summer car was open?

BENNETT: The summer car was open, uh-huh. They could just go in and . . . or they would go when the conductor was going around to move the trolley. They'd get in and you know get where the motorman would be and turn on the juice (commences to laugh) you know that way, and the car would just go wild. It would just run on to the end of the line.

JL: Did anyone ever get hurt during one of those episodes?

BENNETT: No, but I have seen . . . I saw one just plow into Hulman Street there at the end of South 17th line. It plowed into it so that the back end of the car was sticking up in the air probably 7 or 8 feet. (laughs) Then they had to get the wrecker to come (continuing to laugh) pull the streetcar back.

JL: So you had your share of juvenile delinquents in those days, too?

BENNETT: Oh, they had plenty of them!

JL: By the way, what happened to them when they were caught? Did they send them to a . . . to jail?

BENNETT: Yes. They'd take . . . they would take them to the police station and they would get a reprimand. I don't know what might have been done, but they were attended to if they could catch them.

JL: Mrs. Bennett, you told me one time when you were talking about your father's work as a peddler, you said that some of the produce was brought in by the farmers from Prairieton and that those farmers were wiped out during the tornado of 1913. Would you tell us something about where you were and what you were doing on that day of the tornado?

BENNETT: Um hm. The tornado came on the 23rd of March, 1913. I was 17 years old. And my father was really on his deathbed. He died in June. This Easter Sunday was the earliest Easter Sunday that they had known in the past 50 or 60 years. It was on the 23rd of March which was unusual. It was a very sultry, humid day, as early as it was. And ugly, the clouds were ugly. They were muddy looking.

I was going with a young fellow and we had gone to the show that night. We went to the Varieties theater.

JL: Where was the Varieties?

BENNETT: At 8th and Wabash where the Grand is now. It was a vaudeville house and became a movie house. It became the Liberty, then later the Grand. You know the real Grand was wrecked there at 7th and Cherry, and they put the name Grand on this same building which was the Varieties theater. [Now a part of the Tribune-Star Publishing Company.]

JL: O.K. We'll pick up on the Varieties later in the interview. So you were at the Varieties.

BENNETT: Yes. And we got out of the show at 9 o'clock or a little before 9 o'clock. The young man I was with seemed to have a premonition of something. He said, "Let's not get any ice cream tonight." He said, "We'd better get on the streetcar and go home. I feel like there's a bad storm coming." And . . .

JL: Just a moment. You told me once that there was a very popular ice cream place for after the theater.

BENNETT: Uh-huh.

JL: Where was that?

BENNETT: Well, that was at 7th and Wabash. The corner of 7th and Wabash, northwest corner, was a drug-store. And next to it was the Greek candy kitchen and that's where the after-theater people went for refreshments, you see. They were lovely places. We had several fine candy kitchens there and they were all Greek, you know.

JL: Owned by Greeks?

BENNETT: Yes, they were owned by Greeks. They seemed to have, oh, just a knack for making candy and ice cream. These rooms, they were large and were mirrored all around. You could see every inch of the place in the mirrors, you know, just solid mirror sides. And a lot of ice cream tables and all. They were nice.

JL: So that's the place you didn't go?

BENNETT: That's the place we didn't go. We just got on the streetcar and went home. And the wind was

BENNETT: beginning to blow so strongly. I know as we went in the front gate, he grabbed me by the wrist and just pulled me on in the yard. The wind was so strong, it was holding me back, you know. And we hadn't been in the house two minutes 'til the storm struck. It went about 150 feet west of our place and up through, oh, it had come across in a northeasterly direction. It had started down around 9-mile island on the Wabash near the curve in the river, you know, and there was an island there that they called 9-mile island. It seemed to start there and as it blew across, that was when it wiped out so much of what they called Garden Town.

JL: And that was in Prairieton?

BENNETT: That was north of Prairieton. It was where all these fine gardens were and, oh, it was just place after place. They were just fine. They were the ones that came into the market with their produce. It never really recovered from it. It just . . . there still were gardens and all, but somehow it never quite recovered from the storm.

JL: Um hm. Were there any people killed that day in Terre Haute?

BENNETT: I think two were killed.

JL: Now you told me a story about a house which was lifted up and moved . . .

BENNETT: (commences to laugh)

JL: . . . and a baby was on the way during that storm.

BENNETT: Yes. That was on 16th Street there. Sixteenth Street right north of Hulman. It would be about Seabury I think. There was a row of what they called "shotgun" cottages along there. They called

BENNETT:       them . . . they were generally three rooms straight back from each other, you know, and they called them "shotgun" because you could stand in the front door and shoot straight through to the back door. (laughs) So they called them "shotgun" houses.

And so a young woman was having a baby and the doctor was there -- Dr. Spelbring. He also was taking care of my father who was on his death-bed. The storm struck and lifted the entire house, with all who were there, and carried it across, I believe, to about 18th Street. Now I can't quite recall there, but it landed all right and the baby arrived right there and the old doctor came the next day to see my father. He said, "I never took such a fast ride in my life." He said, "We just sailed through the air." And he wasn't at all perturbed. He was just glad the baby came and was all right. No one seemed to have any qualms about it. Everyone laughed about it and all but it was quite something.

JL:               Mrs. Bennett, do you remember any other disasters, major disasters, during the first 20, 30 years of your life in Terre Haute?

BENNETT:       Well, no, not that I could recall at the moment. That would be the worst.

There was the big explosion at Fontanet when I was 11 years old.

JL:               Did a lot of people from Terre Haute work there?

BENNETT:       No, not that I know of. Fontanet was a little place, a little town, and this was the . . . oh, its home office was in New Jersey. It's a French name, the powder mill, and I can't think of the name of it now. /DuPont Powder Mill/ But it was the main business in the little town there. I think

BENNETT: there were eight or nine people killed in that explosion.

JL: But were any of Terre Haute's facilities like the hospitals involved? Did they take care of any of the people?

BENNETT: They probably did, but you see I was just 11 years old and telephones were not the common thing then. I was in school out at Sugar Grove in the 7th grade, and we didn't have a telephone there nor did the neighbors around. We knew that something terrible had happened. There was such a roar and the building shook so and the walls -- the brick walls -- just moved in and went out again.

JL: So the people of Terre Haute could feel . . .

BENNETT: Oh, yes!

JL: Would it have been similar to the vibrations that you might feel /from/ an earthquake which happened some distance . . .

BENNETT: Yes.

JL: . . . away?

BENNETT: The old janitor /Mr. John Erwin/ came over to Sugar Grove and he was quite shaken. He said, "I don't know what it was, but the nearest I can figure is that it was the powder mill at Fontanet." He said, "It's 14 miles up this range of hills and the vibrations from it could come right down this range of hills. Everything around here shook." And he was quite worked up about it.

JL: How soon was it that the community or the people of Terre Haute learned what had happened and how did they learn /about it/?



BENNETT: Well, of course, there were telephones in town you see. It was out there that there were no telephones yet. The school didn't have a phone right at that time. However, we had a telephone at Sugar Grove I think in about a month after that. They got rather worried that we would be so stranded if something happened. And the telegraph was a means of communication, too. Of course, that would come just almost instantly there. All the important things in town, all in any centers, we would know about it right away through the telegraph and the telephone. But the telephone was not the common thing that it is now.

JL: That was about 19 what?

BENNETT: Seven.

JL: Nineteen /hundred/ oh-seven.

BENNETT: It was in October, 1907.

JL: Now I want to go on and talk about your school days at Sugar Grove. I wanted to hear something also about black people in the community and your experience with segregation if there was such a thing in Terre Haute. But first, this Dr. Spellman, wasn't he an herb doctor?

BENNETT: Spelbring.

JL: Spelbring?

BENNETT: Spelbring. No, he was an allopath.

JL: Well, now you knew an herb doctor, did you not, or someone . . .

BENNETT: Yes, a Mr. William Lee, Dr. William Lee. He had graduated from the Asbury College at Greencastle which eventually became DePauw University.

JL: How did you know him?

BENNETT: Well, he lived there at 17th and Hulman, there on the southeast corner. The house is still there.

Let's see, where were we?

JL: You had told me that he was an herb doctor and I believe once you talked about some sort of cure he gave your mother.

BENNETT: Yes.

JL: I am curious to hear about that.

BENNETT: He was a graduate of the physiomedical school of medicine which dealt with herbs -- roots and herbs, you know -- that way. And he chose, after his graduation to teach school rather than to go on and be a doctor with an office. Somehow, I don't know why, he liked to teach. And he taught at the old Montrose School and then he was out at Mount Pleasant, out in the country there.

JL: That's on [State Route] 42?

BENNETT: No, let's see. Mount Pleasant, it's on the old Mount Pleasant road on the way to Riley.

JL: Oh!

BENNETT: Um hm, out there.

And, oh, there was trouble at the school with bad boys as there always is and it was very unpleasant so he gave up schoolteaching and he doctor'd people there on his place. He raised fruit; he raised plums particularly and apples. He made vinegar, you know, and sold it. They had a nice living and . . . but he used to come down and talk in the evenings. He and my father liked to talk

BENNETT: politics and he would tell us experiences of when he was in college and all that. It was just an education to hear him, the things that he could say. So he came down once and he hadn't been down for three nights. We had a very deep snow. In the meantime, my mother had a felon on her finger.

JL: What is a felon?

BENNETT: A felon is like an abscess and it's . . . I think of the bone. I know that they have to lance them. At that time, they would lance them and a piece of bone would come out. The finger would lose that piece of bone. They're very painful, just very, very painful. My mother said that with every beat of her heart, the finger would throb, throb, throb, throb, like what they call a jumping toothache. You know they're just terrible.

Well, she had had this two or three days. She hadn't been able to sleep at all. He said, "Why, you have a felon there." And he said, "Billy, get your shovel and come up to my house." They went up in the snow and they dug up a pokeberry root.

JL: Pokeberry?

BENNETT: Pokeberry root, uh-huh. You know that they cut poke for greens in the spring? And they have a beautiful stem of purple berries on them. They're not edible (laughs) but they're very pretty. And . . . but he dug the root and went down to the house and he roasted this root in the ashes of the cookstove there in the kitchen. And he bound that poke root on this felon with a bandage. You know, bandaged it all up. My mother said that the relief from it was so instantaneous that she just fell forward in the bed and was sound asleep instantly. She hadn't slept for three nights.

He said, "Well, cover her up, Billy. Don't

BENNETT: make her get up and undress. She needs the rest." He said, "Just cover her up, keep her warm, and I'll be down in the morning." And he did. He came about 8 o'clock and came in and she had wakened just about the time he came in the back door. He took the bandage off and the core came out of this abscess on the bandage, you know. She was all right. She was up getting breakfast just right away.

JL: Was that in the days before antibiotics? Were there . . . was there such a thing available?

BENNETT: No. I never heard of antibiotics being around (laughs) at all. The . . . no, this . . .

JL: Well, tell me. Did many people in the community seek his services?

BENNETT: There were quite a few and then there were a lot of them who made fun of him.

JL: Well, was herbal medicine more widely accepted then than it might be today.

BENNETT: No. In fact, herbal medicine is coming into its own nowadays. There are colleges now, especially one in western Canada, that turn out wonderful results. There's still a fight between the various schools. I guess that will always be, and . . . but it's coming into its own like with the health centers and the, you know, the health stores and all. It's the very same thing in a refined form, I would say, because there was a cure for everything in the plant. It would be from the root or the leaves or the blossoms or the stems, you know. And . . . but it's the very same principle.

JL: Now it's put up in refined packages.

(both laugh)

JL: O.K. Well, this is . . . changing the subject rather dramatically before we get on to Sugar Grove. I understand in those early 1900s there was a rather infamous red light district in Terre Haute. I think it was fairly close to that market where the Prairieon farmers brought their produce. At least a portion of the red light district was in that area. I'm wondering if you have any recollections of having seen any of the girls out in front of those houses.

BENNETT: (laughs) No.

JL: Do you remember any stories about anyone who went there to live?

BENNETT: No. No, not at all. That was . . . we didn't even live near it, and it would have been out of our whole setup, you know. The red light district was there all right and the articles that have been written about it, I think they are very accurate describing the houses and all. But I don't know anything about it. Now it, I think, was all on the north side of Wabash on 2nd and 1st Street, along in there. The market was around the courthouse which was south.

JL: So it was a little beyond that?

BENNETT: Yes, just a little beyond that but not very far.

But I know you . . . and there were stories you could read about them but, no, it was out of our category. (laughs)

JL: I mentioned earlier that we would be talking about Sugar Grove and I think you have a story about a black boy . . .

BENNETT: Um hm.

JL: . . . who was a student?

BENNETT: Yes. That was before my days there. It would be about 1900 and my brother Harry, who was 9 years older than I, was in Sugar Grove. I think he was about 13 then.

About a quarter of a mile east of Sugar Grove was a pony farm and it was under the supervision of a Mr. Samuel Fleming, who had a livery stable down on South 4th or South 3rd, along in there. There were several livery stables where the people from the country would drive in with their horses and buggies and the attendants would put the horse in a stall, feed it at noon if you were going to shop all day, and when you came back, they would hitch and have it all ready for you. It was quite a service. It was nice. I think you paid (commences to laugh) 25 cents. The horses were well-treated and it was quite a business.

Well, Mr. Fleming had control of this pony farm. I think that it was really owned by Paul Kuhn, k-u-h-n. He was a prominent man in the racing category and had horse stables and that sort . . .

JL: In Terre Haute?

BENNETT: Yes. Uh-huh. He was a prominent citizen. So Mr. Fleming was the superintendent there. He went to Lexington to attend something about the races and when he came back, he brought a black family -- a man and his wife and a little boy 10 years old -- and they lived there on Hulman Street. The house is still there right east of the township line road. The lake is there now. They had a little racetrack there. It was the cutest thing. They trained the ponies, the little Shetland ponies there. And this colored man was named Lyle. The little boy's name was Belford, Belford Lyle. He was to go to Sugar Grove School. And . . .

JL: Now, was he one of the first black . . .

BENNETT: He was the first.

JL: The first black child?

BENNETT: The first ever to go there to . . . as far as I know. He was a marvelous student. He was only 10 years old but he made fine grades. He was in the 5th grade and his teacher was Miss Carrie Bunce, who had the upstairs east room at Sugar Grove. I had corresponded with Miss Bunce several years ago before her death. She died in California at 96. She wrote that Belford was a splendid student and he was a born sprinter. He could run like a deer. He could outrun any of the big boys. I remember Roy Dempsey told me several years ago when he was back here on a visit and he was talking about Belford Lyle. He said, "He was just a little fellow. He wasn't any higher than that." And he put his hand up about three feet. He said he could run like a deer. He would get a 20-foot start and run toward the fence and then just lift . . . just lift like a deer and go right across the fence and over to the middle of Hulman Street.

JL: How tall was the fence?

BENNETT: Well, it was a regular picket fence. There was a stile there. The stile with three steps and a platform and three steps down into the schoolyard with railings, you know. They called them a stile. That kept any loose cattle or horses from going in.

Roy said that Belford would just rise and just land in the middle of Hulman Street. He'd come back laughing and run up the stile and run down into the schoolyard. Roy said, "We would all be there watching and we'd say, 'Do it again, Belford, do it again!'" And he would. He just entertained them all the time, at noon and recess." Miss Bunce

BENNETT: said that the faculty and students alike just adored him. He had a marvelously sweet disposition.

JL: Did anyone ever tell you how he was received initially when he entered the school?

BENNETT: He was received marvelously. He had such a marvelous disposition and he had this skill of this sprinting that way. And the students just took him in with open arms. There were about a hundred students there.

JL: How was his family received in their homes and in their white neighborhood?

BENNETT: Well, they . . . very well. There were perhaps a few mutterings in the community but nothing ever took place or the mutterings just died out. And Miss Bunce said they were a fine family and very quiet and just fine people.

JL: Do you recall during your school days any unpleasant incidents that involved blacks and whites?

BENNETT: No. It seems as though . . . I would say in all my school experience that the . . . our schools were integrated without being integrated. Integration just seemed to be a natural thing. There were many unpleasant things in Terre Haute I've heard, but they certainly were not where I went to school.

JL: Well, you were going to a school that is now /located/ in Terre Haute but at that time /it/ was considered a country school.

BENNETT: Three miles out. Three miles from the courthouse. And . . .

JL: What about discipline during your schooldays? Were there a lot of problems with students and teachers?



BENNETT: Well, no, not as a rule. It only takes one or two bad students to make all the trouble for 500 other students. It's a . . . there used to be an old saying, "It only takes one roach (laughs) to look like you have a dirty kitchen." At Sugar Grove when my brother Harry was in the 6th grade, there was trouble at the school. There were four big boys, big, strong farm boys, and they got this old idea of running the teacher off. That was a popular thing in school. To take over and run the teacher off.

And one teacher, a Mr. William Wehr was badly injured.

JL: Would you spell his name?

BENNETT: W-e-h-r, and he married Miss Mable Markle, who is a member of the Markle family, you know, up at North Terre Haute.

And so they . . . let me think.

JL: You were talking about the four boys who wanted to run off Mr. Wehr.

BENNETT: Yes. And so they had a fight and they knocked him down and his ankle was broken.

JL: Knocked Mr. Wehr down?

BENNETT: Yes, uh-huh. And he was unable to return to school. Well, then they sent out another teacher by the name of Modesitt, and the boys took him out in the middle of the road and just told him to get back to town and never come back again.

JL: And he went?

BENNETT: And he went. (laughs) He yelled back at them, "I'll be glad to stay in town." And that was it.

BENNETT: Well, the school board was up against it. They went to the YMCA and hired a young man by the name of Richard McCloskey. He was a graduate of the Normal and held license to teach school but he liked to teach athletics and particularly, boxing, at the YMCA, and he was an expert boxer. He was 26 years old. They hired him and they told him that they would stand back of him no matter what he had to do to quell this meanness that was going on at the school because they couldn't have their teachers mistreated the way they were being done.

So he went out /to Sugar Grove/ and it was the last six weeks of school that year. And he . . . let me see. Yes, the second day that he was there, my brother told me, that he was in the room himself; he was in Mr. McCloskey's room and Harry saw the whole thing. He said the second day these four fellows arose from where they were sitting and started to close in on him the way they had done with Mr. Wehr. He saw them coming, he knew what they were up to, and he peeled his coat off and he met them. And my brother said, "I declare Dick McCloskey had 40 fists." He said, "His arms just worked like pistons and he floored all four of them right now!" They were just all on the floor. They got up and he said murder was in their faces, they were so angry, and McCloskey floored them again. And then the third time.

Then he asked them if they'd had enough, and they said yes. So he said, "Now, boys, we've had a fight and I didn't provoke it. I merely defended myself." (The slogan at the YMCA was "Learn the manly art of self-defense.") And he said, "You attacked me . . . wanted to attack me and I knew how to defend myself. I didn't attack you, I only defended myself. Now, I'm still your teacher and at noon every day now after you've had your lunch, we're going up in that vacant room upstairs and

BENNETT: I'm going to teach you how to box." He said, "I'm going to teach you the manly art of self-defense."

And he did. He took them up and he taught them his skills and they just worshiped his shadow. He taught them the philosophy of the thing, of good sportsmanship and how to fight like gentlemen. If they had to fight, they could fight like gentlemen. But mainly, to defend themselves. And so they . . . well, it just changed everything. It changed the boys. They just became good citizens right there. He had to drive out from a livery stable every morning.

JL: Mr. McCloskey?

BENNETT: Mr. McCloskey. He boarded in town. And so he drove out from the livery stable and these boys would be waiting and they'd unhitch and put the shafts of the buggy up so the children couldn't ride on the buggy shafts. At noon they'd go and water and feed the horse and at ten minutes of four, they would get up and leave the room quietly and when McCloskey left the building at 4 o'clock, the horse was hitched and one of the fellows would be standing at the horse's head holding it. And that boy lived south of Hulman Street on 25th and he got to ride with the teacher in to 25th and Hulman, and they talked boxing all the way in just as men talk golf, you know.

Well, he just changed the complexion of the whole . . . the whole thing. There never was trouble at Sugar Grove after that. He taught them his own skills, see; he went into the enemy's camp, and he taught them his own skills and he won the battle.

JL: That's a terrific story! Oh, that we could . . . /today's/ teachers could be allowed to do that.

BENNETT: Yes.

JL: Just once, today!

BENNETT: Yes. Well, that's very true.

JL: Turn things around.

BENNETT: Now, I'll tell you, six years later when I was in the 6th grade there, one day the teachers went over to Mrs. Ripley's and she served a noon meal for them. There were four teachers and one of them was her own daughter, Anna. /Miss Nancy Nusbaum, principal, Carrie Bunce, Grace Lee and Anna Ripley/ They left us on our honor at Sugar Grove to see that things went all right as they were out for an hour.

And so one day we'd had a big snow and the weather was so bad that the boys in the room didn't go out to play ball as they always had done as soon as they'd finished their lunch. They'd go out and practice baseball until the bell rang.

Well, this day was bad and they didn't go out and play ball. They took a sudden notion that they would burn the paddle. The paddle hung on the wall back of the old stove over there. And they thought they would burn the paddle and see what the teacher would say. Our teacher was Miss Nancy Nusbaum.

JL: Nusbaum?

BENNETT: Nusbaum.

JL: Spell that please.

BENNETT: N-u-s-b-a u-m. She later was Mrs. Basil Whitlock.

And so they went . . . Mr. Irwin, our janitor, had been over and stoked the fire with Brazil block

BENNETT: coal, big, huge blocks of coal. They put the paddle in -- they thought they'd burn it -- and it caught fire on one end, and they couldn't get it any farther because it hit the block of coal and it left them helpless. They had to stand there and hold the end of the paddle while the other end of it burned. And they hadn't looked for that. They thought they'd crowd it into the stove and it would disappear.

Well, the door opened and in came Miss Nusbaum 15 minutes early. She saw right now that something was wrong. The fellows were gathered around the stove and everyone was looking frightened, and she went over to the stove and saw what it was. Roy Dempsey was holding the end of the paddle right there. She said, "What does this mean, Roy?" "Well Miss Nusbaum," he said, "you know we hadn't given you any trouble and we thought we didn't need the paddle any more and we'd burn it to save you the trouble." (laughs) . . . .

END OF TAPE 1

TAPE 2-SIDE 1

BENNETT: I'll repeat that. He said, "We hadn't given you any trouble and we thought that we would burn the paddle to save you the trouble." Ordinarily, she would have just flown into a rage. She would have slapped him -- that happened sometimes when things wouldn't go too well -- and this time she didn't. She didn't do anything.

She said, "Well, boys, I guess you're right. We haven't had any trouble but we must have a paddle here. That's a school law. I'll just have to see what we can do about it." But she didn't scold. She didn't . . . she just held her temper and there was just a pall settled over all of us. We all knew that there was some trouble afoot that way.

BENNETT: So she called us to order and we got back into our work. This was on a Friday afternoon. She boarded during the week, as the other teachers did. They found boarding places out as near the school as they could get because the roads were so muddy and bad. But on the weekends, she would ride in with us on Friday night in the kid wagon and go up on the streetcar and go out to 25th and Wabash where her uncle lived, Mr. William Thornton, and stay there the weekend and do up her washing and so forth. Then we'd see her again on Monday morning, and she'd get in the kid wagon with us and ride out to school.

Well, this Friday evening she came out to get in the kid wagon with us and these boys were on the east side of the stile having a very earnest conversation. Their faces were just grave. She never paid any attention. She just got in the wagon and /It/ left her at 17th and Hulman.

Well, on Monday we picked her up and when we got to school, it was just time for it to take up. We went in and these four fellows were in their seats with their noses right down in their arithmetic. They never looked up when we came in.

And again she sensed something that was different. She looked around and there behind the stove hung a beautiful paddle. It was varnished and painted. It was just a lovely paddle and she said, "What's going on here?"

And Orville Spear raised his hand and stood up. He said, "Well, Miss Nusbaum," he said, "we hadn't given you any trouble and we figured that we didn't need the paddle any more and so we thought we'd burn it and save you the trouble. And then we got to thinking and we found . . . we thought that maybe some of the other teachers would

BENNETT: have trouble and that you would need the paddle. So we went to town on Saturday afternoon and bought a paddle." And Roy Dempsey spoke up and he said, "Miss Kusbaum, we had a hard time finding the paddle. This is an apple butter paddle." And she looked at him. She had very white teeth and a wide mouth and her smile just grew and grew and grew until her mouth just seemed to reach from ear to ear. She said, "Well, we do have to have a paddle. That's a school law and I appreciate you getting this nice new paddle for us." And she just let it go at that.

Later in the day, there was a knock at the door and the door opened and in came Mr. Thornton, her uncle. And he came in and he was a short, heavy man with a dark mustache, and he was gruff. He could just be so gruff and he came in and she looked surprised when he came in. She went to him and said, "Oh, Uncle Will, I want to show you something. These fine boys here went to town Saturday afternoon and put their own money into a brand new paddle for us here," and she indicated the paddle hanging there on the wall. Well, he had come out to straighten things out. You know he knew from her visit home over the weekend what had taken place when they tried to burn the paddle.

Well, he looked around and whatever he tried to say was just wiped out with what they had done and her defense of them. And so he said, "Well, ah . . . ah . . . well, I just thought I'd drop in and see how things were going. I . . . I guess you'll be in this Friday night, will you?" And she said, "Oh, yes." And he looked around again, he said, "Well, that's a good-looking paddle. I hope you don't have to use it." (laughs)

/You recall that/ McCloskey taught those fellows to box. And he won the battle in the way that he did. Well, in her case, she refrained from

BENNETT: flying into the rage that everyone was expecting. And she won the battle, too. It was just fine.

It was two examples six years apart. (laughs)

JL: Mrs. Bennett, this Mr. Thornton, was he the Thornton for whom Thornton School was named?

BENNETT: Yes. He was the township trustee.

JL: What was his full name?

BENNETT: William. William A. Thornton. It used to be over the door of Thornton School, you know. And he was her uncle. And that's . . . when the boys saw him come in that day, they just looked desperate because they knew that he knew what they had done. And they knew that he was out there on business. But she just took over and wiped out his chance to state what he thought or whatever he had planned to do. I never heard anything more about the episode, not a thing. It was all settled with just what I've told you.

JL: That's terrific. I think we can all learn a lesson from that, particularly in today's schools.

Well, on this subject of teachers, I know that you have been a piano teacher for how many years?

BENNETT: (chuckles)

JL: Can I ask? (laughs)

BENNETT: Well (continuing to chuckle) I . . . let me see. I started teaching seriously I'll say when I was 23 years old. And that would be back . . . you see I am four years older than the century. (laughs) So I was . . . that would be, if I was 23, it was in 1919. I had taught before just as so many did in the neighborhood. I could play well.



BENNETT: I could read well and all, and there was always someone asking "would you teach Annie today?" Or, "could Mary take music lessons?" And all like that. So I had done much of that since I was 14.

JL: You played by ear. You were playing the piano when you were three or four years old, were you not?

BENNETT: Um hm.

JL: And you also sang?

BENNETT: Yes. (laughs)

JL: Well, were there just neighborhood children who taught you what they knew to begin with?

BENNETT: No, it was mostly my father.

JL: He taught you?

BENNETT: No. No. My father had a beautiful voice. He could play the piano -- again by ear -- but he had played in a Methodist church when he was a young fellow. He could read pretty well. He could play the hymns and whatever was necessary. But he had a beautiful voice, a natural voice, no training, just a beautiful voice. And so much . . . and then my brothers were musical. We were all musical.

JL: Well, tell me, was it the norm for a family to have a piano and to give the children piano lessons or was that an exception to the norm?

BENNETT: Well, most everyone . . . about that time there were a lot of people who had pianos and children took lessons, one kind or another. When my parents were married in 1882, there was not a piano in the whole district there. And they were very poor. (laughs) They had bought a cookstove

BENNETT: that had pots and pans that came with the stove -- an iron stove and big iron skillet to fry steak in and a big iron pot to cook beans in and a big iron teakettle and a big coffee pot. It all came with the stove. They were able to buy their stove and pay cash for it. They had a table and chairs and a bed and a dresser and a rocking chair. And then my father traded two or three things that he had and what little money was left (I think about \$30) on a piano.

JL: Where did he get it?

BENNETT: Well, I don't know. I couldn't say from whom he got it. It was what they called a square grand. It's like the square piano that is down at the museum.

JL: Down at the Historical Museum in Terre Haute?

BENNETT: Yes. /The one/ that Paul Dresser composed "The Banks of the Wabash" on. It was that type of piano.

So for a long time, we were the only family in the community that had a piano. Well, a lot of men in the community could play the fiddle. They called it a fiddle, you know, and they could play their waltzs and schottisches and all that. They would gather at our house every night and by the light of the oil lamp, they would play. My father would accompany them on the piano and he would sing and they'd play their pieces.

There was one man who had had considerable training on the violin at the Cincinnati Conservatory. He played well and he was a member of the orchestra with the Barnum & Bailey circus. They had a fine orchestra.

JL: What was his name?

BENNETT: His name was Syester, Orwell Syester.

JL: Would you spell the last name?

BENNETT: S-y-e-s-t-e-r, Syester. He was a native of Poland, I believe . . . Poland or Staunton. But he was talented. And he had such fine rhythm. He played with such fine rhythm that when the ponies danced -- the ponies would waltz, you know, in the circus -- it was Syester who played for the ponies because he could swoop down on the violin and give them the strong beats, and the ponies always did so well when Orwell Syester played for them.

JL: So all of that must have had a great influence on you as a child?

BENNETT: Well, you see that was even before my day.

JL: I see. Were they still playing together when you were a child?

BENNETT: No. I can barely remember two or three who came visiting in the community and came over to our house in the evening and brought their fiddles as they called them. My father would play with them and he showed me how to play chords and I could play with them, too. There were a couple of them, but they were the only ones that I can remember at all. Their heyday was gone, you see, before I was born. I was born in 1896.

JL: Well, who was your first real teacher in Terre Haute?

BENNETT: Miss Blanche Rippetoe.

JL: Rippetoe. That is spelled r-i- . . .

BENNETT: R-i-p-p-e-t-o-e.

JL: How long did you study with her and tell me something about that experience.

BENNETT: I studied with her 7 years. She had been a former student of Miss Anna Hulman. Then she had the opportunity to go to Europe. She was in Europe a year. I believe an aunt of hers sent her to Europe. And then when she came back to Terre Haute, she established her own studio and taught there. But she was a good teacher, particularly in . . . well, I can say that she gave me a wealth of the musical literature from that standpoint. She required the class to study and write articles on the composers and have them so well learned that they never forgot them. She was excellent in that way.

Then after 7 years, I went to Miss Anna Hulman.

JL: O.K. Before we go on to Miss Hulman, tell me who were some of the other private piano teachers then?

BLNNETT: Oh, let me see. Miss Amelia Meyer was one and Professor Fred Rechlin . . . now, let me think. Professor Rechlin and Professor Herman Leibing were both graduates of Leipzig Conservatory or School, whatever it happened to be, in Leipzig, Germany. They were fine musicians. Just fine musicians.

JL: Were they teaching at the Conservatory?

BENNETT: No. No. Not here. Miss Amelia Meyer was the only one of that group who taught at the Conservatory.

JL: Why did you decide to take lessons from Miss Rippetoe instead of one of the other teachers? Was there any particular reason?

BENNETT: Well, let me see. The Conservatory was going strong when I was about 13, something of that kind. It was not here too awfully long -- two or three, four years, something like that. And I think it

BENNETT: had gone . . . you know, disbanded and there just wasn't any Conservatory any more by the time I took work with Miss Rippetoe which was several years later. But Miss Meyer was a graduate of Chicago Conservatory and she had a marvelous system that she had invented in which every scale, every key, every arpeggio or broken chord, anything related to the basics that way, was learned on the keyboard without ever reading a note. And you learned it so well, your fingers learned everything so well that you never lost it.

JL: Now this was Miss Meyer?

BENNETT: That was Miss Amelia Meyer. /Miss Amelia Meyer was a splendid teacher of pipe organ. A number of her pupils held good church organist positions -- Paul Ausherman, Adeline Schulmeyer, Nettie Morwood and others I didn't know. Also Arthur All, mentioned earlier, was an organist for the Liberty and Indiana Theatres. One of Miss Meyer's piano students was Claude Thornhill, director of a famous big-name band. He held a place right with the other big-name bands./

JL: Uh-huh.

BENNETT: They had told her at the Conservatory where she had organized this that she could turn it in as the thesis if she would like. And she said, no, I'll work on my thesis the same as anyone else. She said, "I've done this as a hobby." She would go out in the park when she was free from her practice and /requirements/ at the Conservatory and work on this system. And it is just superb.

JL: Now you learned this system. Now who did you learn it from?

BENNETT: From her. I took harmony with her at the time I was with Miss Rippetoe and with Miss Hulman.

- BENNETT: They didn't care to teach harmony. They preferred working with performers, you see. They advised going to Miss Meyer because they knew she was a fine teacher of harmony. This system that she had, she didn't seem to give it to everyone unless they really were interested. Some of her own students she said were too indifferent. They liked to play but they didn't like to get into the depth of the study that this took, you know.
- JL: Do you still teach this system today?
- BENNETT: Oh, yes. Yes.
- JL: Do other local private teachers or university teachers teach it?
- BENNETT: I couldn't say.
- JL: Or something comparable to it?
- BENNETT: Yes, they would have something comparable I know, but this to me is the simplest and best that I've ever observed. It really is.
- JL: I just want to ask a few basic questions -- how you got to your lessons, how your fellow students got there and who some of your fellow students were. Now this is when you're about 23 years old or so and you've started with Miss Rippetoe.
- BENNETT: Well, I walked from where we lived east of Fruitridge and Hulman to 17th and Hulman, which was two miles, and got the streetcar. And then . . .
- JL: You had to be earnest about that endeavor, didn't you?
- BENNETT: You bet you did! Hulman Street at that time was very . . . it was a dirt road. It wasn't paved,

BENNETT: you know. And with the . . . well, it was hard walking.

JL: Did most of the other students walk to their classes, too?

BENNETT: Oh, they -- practically all of them -- lived in town. They would go on the streetcar, but the streetcar ran very close to their homes. We had a lot of streetcars.

JL: Who were some of these students? Did any of them become private teachers? Are they still alive today?

BENNETT: Well, I just couldn't say now. She had quite a class up in Collett Park Place and at that time Collett Park Place was . . . no so many of them were wealthy coal operators and their children came to her. She lived on North 8th Street about 18 . . . the number was 1824 North 8th. Collett Park is up about, oh, it's a few blocks north, you know. So she had a lot of students from there and all around. She had a nice class. And then, of course, automobiles were coming in, too, and a lot of times the family -- the father or the mother -- would bring the children.

JL: What did it cost to go to a lesson and how long did your lesson last?

BENNETT: Well, I paid a dollar when I started. The lesson was an hour.

JL: Let's see. Do you remember . . . do you happen to know if any of your co-students went on to achieve any kind of fame? Or did anyone become a professional musician?

BENNETT: Not of that group particularly that I know of. I think some of them took up the music course as they got into Indiana State Teachers College, you

BENNETT: know, and were teaching in schools. But I don't recall anyone that . . . I couldn't say now.

JL: Were there more girl students than boy students in those days?

BENNETT: Yes. Yes.

JL: And that's still pretty much the case, isn't it?

BENNETT: Yes, it seems to be although she had quite a few boy students but more girl students. That's true.

JL: Do you feel that the students were more highly motivated in those days? Did their parents encourage them more with their music education than they do today?

BENNETT: Well, it was a culture. Everyone wanted their children to have music because it was a cultural thing. Everyone liked for their children to have music. They saw that they practiced. That was the nice thing about it.

And there were not so many activities. There wasn't so much to entertain the children. No radio, no TV, nothing of that kind, and it was a social kind of thing, too, because it was something that they got dressed up for and went to their lesson once a week, or twice a week, whichever they did. Then there were recitals. They played in a recital once or twice a year. It was a nice social thing that people liked their children to have advantage of.

JL: Tell me about a recital that you took part in. Can you describe where it was and who came?

BENNETT: Well, in her case it was in her front room. She had a sizable house, nice rooms with big door-



BENNETT: ways, and she would get chairs from the undertaker. (laughs) The undertaker would bring folding chairs, you know. And there would be an audience of perhaps 30 people, something like that.

JL: Mostly parents.

BENNETT: Mostly parents.

JL: As it would be today.

BENNETT: And neighbors and friends and, you know, all. But her house was always nicely filled. (chuckles)

JL: You know I've read that at the Conservatory of Music, students (this is a quote from something that I read on it) "Students worked on development of wrist and fingers to control touch and technique." Now I know from studying with you that /you place/ a great emphasis on touch and technique. Did you begin learning this in the days with Miss Rippetoe?

BENNETT: To a little degree, not too much. That really came when I was with Miss Hulman.

JL: Um hm. Well, tell me then about your experiences with Miss Anna Hulman. Was she considered the private teacher of Terre Haute or just one of the private ones?

BENNETT: Well, she was one of several. As I said . . .

JL: But I meant, one of the best? Was there a reputation that she held . . .

BENNETT: Yes. She and Miss Eva Alden were the two leading teachers, I would say. Miss Eva Alden was a graduate of the New England Conservatory.

JL: And Miss Hulman was graduated from where?

BENNETT: Well, she had graduated from Cincinnati College of Music, not the Conservatory but the College of Music. Her uncle was the first Mr. Hulman here who had the big wholesale grocery business there at 9th and Wabash.

JL: That was Herbert?

BENNETT: No, Herman Hulman. He was very proud of her. Her father was Theodore Hulman, who was a jeweler.

JL: Where was he? Did he have a jewelry store down on Wabash Avenue?

BENNETT: I think his store when I was a youngster was there in one part of Paige's, where Paige's had the pianos on one side in the back. Mr. Hulman, E. T. Hulman, I believe, had that side and later, Mr. Joseph Kern took over the jewelry window there. It would just be a small office with his repair things and a nice window for display.

JL: O.K. Now you were about 30 years old when you began studying with Miss Hulman, right?

BENNETT: Yes.

JL: How long did you study with her?

BENNETT: Well, I was with her 20 years off and on but mostly, on. (laughs)

JL: But you certainly must have gotten to know her well -- at least as a teacher?

BENNETT: Yes. Yes. Quite well.

JL: What made her better in the community's eyes, a better teacher than one of the other leading teachers?

BENNETT: Well, she was a wonderful teacher. Then she had a background -- European background there. As I started to say, she graduated from the Cincinnati College of Music with highest honors. And her uncle, Mr. Hulman, was so proud of it that he sent her to Vienna to study with the great teacher Theodor Leschetizky. She was there two years. Then she also studied with a great woman pianist I think in Berlin. (My material was destroyed in that fire this last December and there's so much that I could . . . that I can't recall easily because the material was burned.) But as I recall from what I had, she studied with Teresa Carreno a very fine woman pianist. I think she had some work in England. I'm not positive.

But she told me that when she came back to the United States, she gave a concert at Carnegie Hall. Town Hall they called it then and it's now Carnegie Hall, you know, a fine place for concerts. In the audience was Mr. Herbert Witherspoon, who was a fine basso of the Metropolitan Opera and also a fine teacher and musician in every way, of course. He was so impressed with the beauty of the tone and her phrasing and everything in that that he came backstage and asked her if she would consider staying in New York and accompanying his fine class of opera singers -- those that came to him for coaching and teaching. He said, "The things you play, the way you play, the material you use, is exactly what I need in my studio." And so she did. She stayed a year in New York and played for his class. And she said that it was such a valuable year because she absorbed so much of the fine opera literature, the knowledge of it and what he required and all, and it was very helpful. She helped me greatly in that -- in my accompaniment work.

Then she came back to Terre Haute and organized a class. /Among the students in Miss Hulman's

BENNETT: class, I recall Alma Frisz, Vivien Bard, Mary Heaton (Winn), Myrle Zaring, Alice Hudson, Paul Fidler, Frederick Black, Dean Armstrong, Raymond Lowry, Nettie Morwood, Helen Slack, Margaret Mary Kelley, Florence Bear, Margaret Child, Mildred Nattkemper, Henrietta Dies, Jane Kivits, and Lois Beasley.<sup>7</sup> At that time there would be Miss Hulman, Miss Eva Alden, Professor /Hermann/ Leibing and Professor /Fred/ Rechlin and Miss Amelia Meyer, who were our five highly talented and developed teachers.

JL: I believe you told me the last time I talked with you that Miss Meyer played the piano. Was she the one who played brilliantly, or poetically? You told me a story and I've forgotten it about two pianists, or two piano teachers and their performances and the way that the public viewed them.

BENNETT: Well, no, it was two students . . .

JL: Two students.

BENNETT: Uh-huh. Of Miss Hulman.

JL: I see.

BENNETT: See, Vivien Bard is, I think, her most noted student, you know. And Vivien has had marvelous advantages in every way. She graduated from DePauw after years with Miss Hulman. The funny part of it is Vivien and I were in high school at the same time. She was with Miss Hulman when she was 13 years old and I was 30 when I began with Miss Hulman. So there's . . . in the meantime in there Vivien had the advantage of graduating from DePauw music school. I think that she was /In the/ Chicago Conservatory or a conservatory in Chicago, I think now, but she's had wonderful advantages. And . . .

JL: She was a teacher at the Laboratory School, was she not?

BENNETT: No, she was a teacher at the College.

JL: I thought it was . . . O.K.

BENNETT: At the College. And a fine private teacher. And a splendid composer. She's a fine composer. Her fine "Anthem" has been used so much by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, you know, and all that. No, Vivien is just tops in every way.

JL: Well then, all this time you were teaching before you started /studying/ with Miss Rippetoe, is that right?

BENNETT: Well, yes.

JL: And then continuing?

BENNETT: Uh-huh. Yes.

JL: When did you decide that you were going to become a piano teacher and that /that/ would become your life's work? /At/ about what age?

BENNETT: Well, it was no particular decision. It seemed as though it just happened. I could do it easily; I liked it; I liked the contact with all the families that I taught with. I went to the home, oh, several years.

JL: You actually went to the student's home at this time. How did you get there -- on the street-car?

BENNETT: Um hm. And I enjoyed knowing them in their homes. The mothers were always so nice. And they'd have a piece of pie or something for me before I started on. (laughs heartily)

JL: Well you said when you started taking lessons, it cost a dollar. How much did you charge?

BENNETT: Well, when I started, I was paying then . . . Miss Rippetoe had raised her price to \$2.50, and so I charged a dollar and a quarter when I started. That had to cover streetcar fare and lunch money if I were downtown all day, you know. I'd go to the ten-cent store and get a sandwich and a cup of coffee. (laughs)

JL: /During/ your teaching career you've had a couple of students who have been outstanding. Could you cite a couple of them? I believe one was the Masters boy, wasn't it?

BENNETT: Yes, John. John played beautifully. He is a doctor of psychology now in . . . he lives in Nashville, Tennessee. His work is all there, but John plays all the time yet. He has a big Yamaha Grand. He wrote on a Christmas card. He has, I think, a 7-foot Yamaha Grand, and he plays and enjoys playing duets with other talented people who . . . you know, who play.

Eric Bauer was a splendid student. He had that German love of music and very . . . he was talented and /had a/ very cultured mind. He's one of the younger attorneys here in town. And his father, by the way, was a Sugar Grove boy. His father is an attorney, also, of the firm but he was a Sugar Grove boy.

JL: Now this was . . . his father was Lenhardt Bauer?

BENNETT: Um hm.

JL: You know Lenhardt Bauer has been one of our narrators in the oral history program.

BENNETT: Uh-huh. Well, Eric is his son.

JL: Tell me, how did the Depression years affect your teaching career and your lives in general?

BENNETT: Well . . .

JL: Did people still come to take lessons? Did they have the money to pay?

BENNETT: Well, they still came but it was a time of bartering. (laughs) I was married by that time and there were students who would come . . . I remember one boy, Chelsea Stockwell. He became a . . . he was a voice student. And he became quite an evangelistic singer.

He would show up -- he was about 16 years old -- he'd show up with a bushel of green beans. He'd say, "Miss Bennett, do you have time to can some green beans? I want a voice lesson today." (laughs) And it was just that way.

I remember one woman who came. Her name was Stewart; she's gone now. She had a boy named Jack and they were quite religious. She was wanting him to go into evangelistic work. She said she would like to trade milk, eggs, a chicken at times and cottage cheese, butter, anything like that, for Jack to have lessons. Jack just had to have lessons. And so, we took him on.

Well, the year that my husband died . . . by the way, he died in /19/37 on . . . today, the 27th of June. So she had been . . . they had been leaving a quart of milk every day. They had a milk wagon. And so they kept leaving the milk and leaving the milk and they wouldn't stop to collect and they would just sort of disappear. I'd call her and I'd say, "I want you to come and collect. I don't want my bill to get too big." "Well, now don't you worry about the bill. We'll stop some of these days. We've been awfully busy. Are you getting your milk all right?" "Yes."

Well, after six months one day she came. "Now," she said, "I'll answer your question. You

BENNETT: know when Mr. Bennett died, Jack wanted to send a big spray of carnations. We couldn't afford it. We just didn't have the money." "Jack," she said, "now, we'll continue to leave a quart of milk every day for Mrs. Bennett and have her not pay for it for a while. That'll do her more good than a big spray of flowers that would just wilt down out there in the cemetery." So she said, "Now, it's been six months, and if you are able to begin to think of paying for the milk, it's all right. If you can't, just say so because it'll still go on just the same way. Jack has to have his lessons." (laughs)

JL: Do you think there was a lot of that kind of attitude during the Depression?

BENNETT: Oh, yes. Yes. There was a lot of that.

JL: There was a real pulling together of communities everywhere?

BENNETT: And the nice thing to remember is there [was no] grouching about it. People didn't complain. That was just that way and they just did the best they could. Everyone did that way. We traded lessons for anything you could think of that way. And everyone got along. We weren't wealthy certainly or anything, but everyone got along.

JL: Well, what about attitudes, particularly your students' attitudes, during the Depression? Were they . . . did they change during that time?

BENNETT: Well, the ones I dealt with at that time were more the voice class.

JL: Now I should introduce this to the listeners that in addition to being a piano teacher, because your husband was a voice teacher, you [also] became a voice coach.



BENNETT: Yes.

JL: Because I hadn't introduced that before.

BENNETT: And accompanist.

JL: An accompanist for your husband.

BENNETT: And, of course, after we were married the going to the house for the students and all was . . . that was out. In fact I had no time to be- cause he had a large class and by the time I did my housework and took care of things, you know, that way and played for the class, I had a full- time job.

JL: So you didn't teach during the years you were married to him?

BENNETT: I had one lesson . . . one lesson that came every week.

JL: Now what years were those?

BENNETT: Well, let's see . . . '32 to '37. There were five years.

JL: O.K. Now tell us about Mr. Clyde Bennett, your husband. He was a voice teacher and he was the leader of the Rose Glee Club, isn't that right?

BENNETT: Yes. First of all, he had the choir at the Congregational church. And the choir . . .

JL: That's the First Congregational on Ohio?

BENNETT: Uh-huh. The choir was entirely made up of his voice students. It was like one big technique. You know, they breathed alike, they phrased alike and all because their private work was brought

BENNETT: right into the development of it in their anthems and all. And then . . . let me see.

I know we were . . . this was in 1932. We were married in September and about the first of October, he was giving a lesson one day and a gentleman rang the doorbell. I didn't know him, a white-haired man, and he wanted to know if he could speak with Clyde. I told him he was giving a lesson but asked him to come in and wait. And so when Clyde came out of the studio, he went to him. He said, "Mr. Bennett, I'm Dr. Prentice, president of Rose-Poly." And Clyde said, "Oh, Dr. Prentice, I knew you by sight but have never known you." "Well," he said, "I've come to see if you would consider taking over the Glee Club."

Clyde said, "Well, Dr. Prentice, I've never done glee club work." He said, "I've had male quartets and private lessons and the choir, but I've never done glee club work." "Well," Dr. Prentice answered, "I've seen what you did with that choir and I want you for the Glee Club." So he . . . we were hired right there.

JL: Now by this time was Rose out east on U.S. Highway 40?

BENNETT: Uh-huh. It went out there, I think, in 1922.

JL: Well, did the Rose Glee Club just perform for Rose Poly functions, or did it perform all over town?

BENNETT: No, it gave programs. The boys' greatest trouble was having time . . .

JL: Well, can you . . .

BENNETT: . . . to give to programs.

JL: . . . give us some examples of the kinds of places where they performed?

BENNETT: Well, the high schools, particularly. And we went to places like, oh, even as far as Linton and Riley and Clinton and Brazil, you know, and . . .

JL: How were you getting . . . were you going on the interurban then or . . .

BENNETT: No, they all drove.

JL: They drove?

BENNETT: Uh-huh, they drove. There would be . . . and some of the faculty had big cars and they were very proud of their Glee Club and they would take a carload, you know. Several of them /Dr. Prentice and Professor Child particularly/ did that regularly. Awfully nice.

No, the lack of time was always the thing there that was hard to combat because if they were having examinations the next day, that just had to be. And so that had to come first.

JL: Are there any people /still/ around Terre Haute who were . . . your husband's students or anyone who became a voice teacher or became famous in some way?

BENNETT: Well, not that I can recall just at the moment. I just couldn't say now at all because, my . . .

JL: It's been a while.

BENNETT: Yes. I stayed with the Glee Club 26 years and I resigned in 1958.

END OF SIDE 1

TAPE 2-SIDE 2

JL: Mrs. Bennett, you said that you resigned from the Rose Glee Club in 1958. Why did you decide to resign?

BENNETT: Well, I had been with them 26 years and there had been . . . let me see. My husband was the first director. Then a pupil of his, Chelsea Stockwell, had them a year and a portion of another year. Then Mr. Emil Taflinger was with them about 13 years. During his time, he was singing with a very fine male octet that traveled all over the country, gave big programs all over the country. He wanted to finish the season with them, so Mr. Orville Hawkins from Casey, Illinois, who had the music at the high school, came over and worked with the boys that one season. They did some beautiful work.

And then, Mr. Taflinger took over. Then he retired in . . . let me see . . . about '53, I guess. Miss Gertrude Meyer, who was teaching at the Laboratory School up at Indiana State, worked with us the last five years. I had enjoyed the work with her very much. She was cooperative and, well, just fine. Fine musician and everything was so agreeable. The boys liked her and they . . . well, everything was just fine. It just was, again, a matter of beginning again with a different director. Already there was quite a trend coming on in that the older people who were in positions of that kind were withdrawing from it and giving it to the younger people which happened there. There was a younger director chosen and a younger accompanist. They were both very accomplished young people from up at the college here and it just seemed a nice time to do it. Dr. Wilkinson, who at that time was the president of Rose, was very sorry. He wanted me to stay, but I just felt it was just a good time to make the break.

JL: Now the Rose Glee Club won a state-wide competition, did they not when you were accompanist?

BENNETT: (laughs) Yes. That was right in the first year that we had them. And it was . . . we had 15 in the Glee Club. And they were . . . most of them were baritone. That was always the funny thing. They were just baritones -- high baritone, mid-baritone, low baritone. /We/ had one fine bass. One fellow was a fine bass voice, but no tenors. There were high baritones. Well, there were 15 of them. They came to our house. We lived up on Third Avenue, and they came to our house to rehearse. And they told Clyde . . . they just broke the news to him that they had signed up to sing in an intercollegiate meet in two weeks. Well, he was just aghast at the idea. They had done nice work through the year but not . . . they were not what he would want for anything of that kind.

So they insisted and Dr. Prentice insisted. He said, "Well, I want the fellows to be happy and let them sing, no matter what they do." Well, that just wasn't our way of working. So Clyde said, "I'll take it on one condition. They must come to our house every night and rehearse from 8 to 10 on what this program is going to be." Their work was always memorized, and they had a marching type of song well memorized. And then there was a very lovely soprano in the class, a fine coloratura, and they were to prepare "The Italian Street Song" from Naughty Marietta because her voice was adequate for that. And her name was Dorothy McCullough.

So she came and stayed the two weeks at our house. She lived at Saline City and she came up and stayed the two weeks at our house in order to rehearse every night with those boys.

And there was another /in the class/, a very fine tenor, a fellow who attended Indiana State /and/ was preparing to teach /public/ school /music/

BENNETT: when he graduated. Well, he had a splendid voice and Clyde just borrowed him, brought him in. And he came -- he was delighted with the prospect -- he came in every night, rehearsed from 8 to 10. His voice just soared. It just simply soared to the highest note without any effort whatever. And that put confidence into the three light baritones who were struggling along to do the tenor part. So they did better than they had ever done.

And so we went over to Indianapolis. Yes, the meet was held at Indianapolis. And it represented the colleges of the state. There was Notre Dame and, oh, Indiana University, Purdue, DePauw . . . I don't think that Indiana State sang that spring. I can't quite recall that. I don't think they did. I hope . . . I hope I'm not mistaken but I can't recall them in the group. And then there were Evansville and, oh, the one up in the north part of the state near Notre Dame. I forget it now. /Valparaiso/ There were at least six I guess /seven/ in the meet including Rose Poly. And when we got there . . . well, let's see. Clyde, of course, had been a military man and knew how to drill in a military fashion, knew what to demand. And the boys had their ROTC work out at Rose and he drew on that. He drew on their posture and their getting off and getting on the stage and all. I remember they would walk in from the living room into the studio as if they were coming on stage and at first, you know, their hands were uneasy and he said, "Put your second finger on the seam of your trousers and get the feel of having your hand right there instead of waving your hands or putting them in your pockets, nothing like that." And they did. And, of course, it soon became habitual and they just . . . they were just fine. That was back right shortly after the Depression and they had to rent tuxes. A couple of the boys had wealthy fathers, and they owned tuxes but most of them had to rent or borrow tuxes.

BENNETT: When we /arrived/ at Indianapolis, /we/ looked at the program and /saw that/ we followed Notre Dame which had 55 voices. Clyde said to our bass . . . his name was Richardson, Harry Richardson. They called him "Bull," "Bull" Richardson out at Rose Poly, he was a big football man and just an excellent athlete and that was his nickname, "Bull" Richardson. /Clyde/ said, "'Bull,' do you realize that we follow Notre Dame? They have 55 voices and we have 15." /Bull/ said, "Well, Chief, they have 35 more chances to make a bust than we have!" (laughs) That was his attitude. And he gave the attitude to the boys the same way. Well, our turn came and we went on and, oh, the drilling had counted. I tell you when they went on stage, they were just a picture in the precision of their getting on stage, getting placed, you know, everything that way. So they sang their two songs and we knew that it had gone well. There was certainly no trouble in it. They'd done it well; they'd done what we wanted them to and so we went on down in the audience to watch the rest. And when we got down there, we saw there were . . . well, as they came on, it seemed as though the emphasis on fine drilling had not been stressed in the schools. The mixed choruses wore mixed costumes. Some girls wore formals, some long formals, some short formals, some purple, some pink, just all colors, and they stood with their hands behind them and . . . well, they just stood how they pleased, all the way through. And it was the same throughout.

Purdue came the next best to having a more drilled stance, much more than the others. A gentleman was sitting right in front of us and he wore a tux. He was very busily keeping count on a sheet of paper. Clyde got a glimpse of him and it was Dean McCutcheon of DePauw, the head of the music over there. So Clyde leaned over and he said, "How are they going, Mr. McCutcheon?" He didn't even glance around; he just answered back

BENNETT: over his shoulder, "I've given Rose Poly first." Clyde said, "My goodness! You . . . they're such a small group." /Mr. McCutcheon answered, "I don't care. They came on stage like men. They sang like men. I understood every word they sang, and they left the stage like men. They're fighters, those fellows. They're fighters in athletics and everything. They fight to the last minute." And he said, "My hat's off to them. To me, Rose Poly I'm giving first place."

He was judging. He was the one judge of it. And so that was it. We . . . and . . . (laughs)

JL: You won.

BENNETT: But it was due to the careful . . . careful drilling and just not permitting anything less than the best.

JL: What has happened to the . . . does the Rose-Hulman Institute have a glee club?

BENNETT: Sure.

JL: Today?

BENNETT: Yes.

JL: Have you seen them perform in recent years?

BENNETT: No. No, I haven't but certainly through no fault of theirs nor mine. I'm always teaching. Any programs they might give or anything of the kind of any other . . . I don't get to hear the symphony or just a number of things that way because those are my teaching hours and that's the way I make my living. I can realize what Miss Meyer and Miss Hulman and Miss Alden and all those teachers used to say. It's a dead loss if we take out an evening to go to hear something that way



BENNETT: because we're teaching at that time and the money is lost. It was the same . . . in my case, I'm teaching busily at that time of night or time of the evening. I'm tired from a heavy schedule. Of course, I don't drive and people have offered to take me, very kindly, and it's nice but I just . . . there's just not time to do all of it and do justice to my own work. That must come first.

JL: Before we leave the section on your teaching and musical career, I would like a few comments about the emphasis on the technical work that you teach and that Miss Hulman taught you. On the technique. What exactly is it? Also I'm curious to know if the technique the way you were taught to teach it from Miss Hulman and the way you teach it to your pupils today is still widely taught?

BENNETT: Well, it depends a great deal . . . her work . . . Of course, Leschetizky was a fine teacher and it was with a heavy shoulder drop and all. But she had the influence there of a teacher by the name of Deppe, d-e-p-p-e. He was a teacher who had I could say, devised this matter of phrasing on the piano being on the same order as the phrasing on a violin. The violinist starts with his hand. The bow held up, you know, high and goes down for the tone and the bow comes back and ends in that same position that it started. Deppe studied that: why there was a technique for fine violinists which was always the same. There was not the same technique for pianists. It was different with every teacher he went to. Every teacher had a fine point and gave it and seemed to feel that they had the thing.

Now the thing that always is . . . I felt convinced of the good in it, was the fact that no matter how trained one is there is always one part of a piece . . . maybe the whole piece is rather easy to do except one part. There will be one run

BENNETT: or one part that is difficult. And this Deppe had students who came to him from all the fine teachers. They would bring pieces that they were learning or concertos they were going to play with some orchestra. Always there was a passage that they were having difficulty with. And they couldn't . . . they would blame their fourth fingers, they would blame their fifth fingers and you know all that and he would say it's just the technique you're needing right there. And this . . . he would correct it every time with this movement that starts like the violinist. And it would straighten it out every time.

Well, they began leaving their teachers and coming to him to study. Miss Hulman /never studied/ with Deppe. /He died in 1890 and was somewhat before her time./ But she was influenced by /him/ because Deppe and Leschetizky were contemporaries and good friends in every way. She got the benefit of it probably from Leschetizky himself. I'm not sure because I . . . all I know is the little she told me.

JL: Was she the only teacher while you were a student who was teaching the technique this way in Terre Haute?

BENNETT: Well, I think so and yet, Miss Eva Alden studied with several fine teachers who had more-or-less the same approach, somewhat different but still rather on the same. Her students were very graceful and played very well, just exceedingly well, and yet their approach was different.

I know she had one teacher. His name was Schmitz, s-c-h-m-i-t-z, Robert Schmitz. He had what he called the slapping method. To emphasize as they crossed hands or anything, it would be a slapping movement from the wrist, but it was accurate. It would make a fine effect, a fine

BENNETT: tone and everything And yet it was different than Deppe but with the same thing in mind.

I like the idea of what Deppe projected there because of the grace of the violinists. That was testing that he took his example from.

JL: Well, you've been a teacher but you've also been an observer and especially now, do you think that students are learning this technique from other teachers in Terre Haute? Is it being taught very widely today?

BENNETT: Well, I really could hardly answer it. Now Vivien Bard is a fine example of that work. Her students are, you know, good products. Like Vivien, they have gone on to other higher learning. Like Miss Stella Tatlock has . . . she was just a star pupil of Miss Bard's but she has had work at Indiana University and Northwestern and, well, just a lot. And /she/ worked with fine teachers privately. The basic, I've read and I think it is true, that once it is in the hand, in the wrist, and all like that, the benefit of it stays with. No matter how they go to teachers who could add other things to it or change it or anything, the basic is always there. It's always there. And so, I couldn't say more than that. But I understand that it is coming back into the pianistic work. It's being accepted again. There were a number of years when it was considered old-fashioned and, you know, just out of date and all that. Then suddenly you begin to know . . . it's European really. I know that there is just a . . . well, anyone who's ever known it can recognize it instantly. It's European training. Of course, that's where she got it.

JL: Um hm.

Well, we'll move on now to Terre Haute and the performing arts.

BENNETT: (chuckles)

JL: If you will allow that.

I'm curious to know something about your experiences as a child and as a young woman and in your middle years and /then something about/ the kinds of entertainment that were available to you in Terre Haute.

BENNETT: Well, the main thing was the show, of course. Everyone went to the show.

JL: What's your earliest recollection of going to vaudeville house?

BENNETT: Well, let me see. I think I might have been probably 10 or 11, something like that. But really the vaudeville came on around 19--, oh, I'll say around 1910 or '11 or '12, maybe 1908, back like that. We had the Grand, the Grand Opera House, which was for opera and all the fine concerts and all that way. And it was a well-planned building. Its acoustics were just great. I've been told that people in the profession would say, well, where are you going from here, and they'd say, well, our next stop is Terre Haute. "Oh, you'll be at the Grand. You're lucky! It's not the biggest theater in the world but it has acoustics that are just marvelous!" You know. It had that reputation all over the country.

JL: Do you suppose the structure of the Grand was one of the things that brought famed vaudeville acts to Terre Haute? Do you think that's what drew /them/?

BENNETT: Of course, it would be . . . that is I don't know that I could say yes right off, but they were always glad when they could come. They knew that

BENNETT: the acoustics would be good. They could give a good performance because the sound would come back to them just right. So there was the Grand and then there were earlier theaters that were before my time that I never knew anything about. And . . .

JL: What about the Varieties?

BENNETT: Well, the Varieties was there where the present Grand is now. After they tore down the old Grand building, they changed the name of the Liberty theater to the Grand in order to keep the name Grand alive in Terre Haute. But the Liberty first of all was the Varieties.

JL: Now on what street . . . that's on the corner of . . .

BENNETT: It's on Wabash at 8th . . . 8th and Wabash. Now my acquaintance /with the Varieties/ came about 1910. The Varieties was on the south side of Wabash and right across the street was the Lyric. It had a /fine/ circuit, too. They had coupons in the paper that made it easier for people to go to the show because it helped expensewise, you see. People didn't have money then like they do now.

JL: How much were the coupons good for?

BENNETT: There? Well, it would be like 50 cents and a coupon put you in for a whole afternoon's entertainment of five acts. And they were good. They were fine.

They would start early in the afternoon -- I presume one o'clock or something like that -- and would end about three, something that way. And then they would just exchange theaters, the Lyric people would all come across the street and go to the Varieties for the second performance and the people from the Varieties went across the street

BENNETT: to the Lyric for its second performance. So everyone had a full afternoon of entertainment between the two.

Now later, the Lyric gave up the vaudeville part of it and became the Orpheum movie house. It was a movie house.

JL: About when did that change come about?

BENNETT: Well, it must have been along about the same time, 1912.

JL: At that time, weren't all movies silent?

BENNETT: Oh, no!

JL: They weren't?

BENNETT: Oh, no.

JL: I don't know when the first talkies came.

BENNETT: Uh-huh. No, the first talkie came on in about 1926.

JL: So they were all . . . and you said about . . . they were still silent in 1912.

BENNETT: They were silent, yes.

JL: That's what I . . .

BENNETT: Oh, I see.

JL: That's what I said. So they still had people accompanying the . . .

BENNETT: Oh, yes! They had live orchestras.

JL: Did you ever know any of the musicians?

BENNETT: Yes. They were . . . they were good musicians. Mr. . . . let's see. Mr. Pete Breinig had the orchestra at the Grand, the first that I ever knew about. I was about 12 years old /and/ the first show that I saw there was /during/ the Christmas vacation. It was a play -- a musical play -- called The Honeymoon Trail, full of beautiful music and dancing and a nice plot and all. And the musicians . . . our seats were always in the balcony, and we could see what was going on. We could see the orchestra. And there was a . . . Mr. Breinig had a niece who played, I think, the first violin. She was fine. I can't quite recall her name, but she was getting ready to go to do her playing one evening and had the curling iron in the oil lamp chimney to heat the curling iron. (That's the way we hung our curling iron, in the chimney of the oil lamp.) She had cleaned her silk blouse with gasoline and the fumes were not yet aired out of it. She was in a hurry and the lamp exploded and she died. It burned her to death.

I think her first name was Marie, but I can't recall the second name.

And then, of course, there was a man with drums; there was a cellist and a big bass /Viola played, I believe, by Ora Davis/. There would be some cornet or a trumpet or whatever was called for. They were very adept. Some of these men could play several instruments.

JL: Were most of these musicians for those vaudeville houses in Terre Haute from . . . were the musicians local?

BENNETT: Every one of them. Yes, /indeed/ they resided here. And that was the Grand orchestra. Then later it was replaced with Mr. George Jacobs and his wife who was at the piano and then I think that probably the rest of the orchestra were much the same as they were when Mr. Breinig had them. The

BENNETT: drums and all the other orchestral instruments, you know.

Then later the Indiana theater was built, and it had five /acts of vaudeville/. It had the Pantages circuit there. Very fine vaudeville. Mr. Arthur Hill was the leader of the orchestra and his lovely wife, Lois, was the pianist. And again, the bass and the cello /musicians/ and all seemed to be much the same people. At least they were . . . the only ones I seem to know as I look back were the leader and the pianist, you know. See, there was Mr. Jacob and his wife; there was Arthur Hill and Lois there; and then they began putting pipe organs in that would play in between reels you know.

JL: Wasn't there a man named W. Remington Welch, who was I think the resident organist at the Indiana theater for a number of years? Did you know him?

BENNETT: No, the name . . . now I don't remember that name. It seems to me that that was the name of the man who gave a recital on the big Wurlitzer organ.

JL: Um hm. They called it the Mighty Wurlitzer.

BENNETT: Yes.

JL: That was not the same as the pipe organ though that you were talking about.

BENNETT: Well, the Wurlitzer was a pipe organ but it's a theater organ. It's now I believe at the Jewish Temple on South 6th Street. I think it is.

And it had effects. You know they could . . . they could seemingly be playing drums or mandolins and all by just having different stops. That's why they called it the Mighty Wurlitzer. It was



BENNETT: just like a whole orchestra in one, you see. And I believe that he was the man who gave a recital which demonstrated what that organ could do. I think that was it because there were several organists. Dean Armstrong was one and Arthur All played there.

JL: A-1-1?

BENNETT: Yes. He was organist at the First Baptist church, too. And then Arthur /and he/ also played at the Liberty. They had an organ there at the Liberty.

JL: Now the Liberty was the movie house?

BENNETT: Yes. Liberty was what had been the Varieties.

JL: I get a little turned around. Say around 1910, vaudeville was . . . first it was at the Grand and then it was at the Varieties and /then/ the Lyric. Is that right?

BENNETT: Um hm. /No./

JL: How many different houses were there going at one time for vaudeville?

BENNETT: Oh, dear. Well, the thing is the Grand was not so much a vaudeville house. It was for concert and plays, you know, and opera and all. Vaudeville came in more at the time the Varieties came on. It was a different thing. And it had its own house, you know. So, the Indiana and then later the one there at Ohio and . . . 8th.

JL: The Hippodrome?

BENNETT: Hippodrome, uh-huh. That came on in 1915.  
And then we had lesser houses, movie houses.

BENNETT: There was the American and the Savoy /the Rex and several others/. Those were small but you could see the /reruns/. A play that you /had/ enjoyed at the big house would always return to some of the lesser ones a little later. And you could go see the very same movie at one of the lesser houses.

JL: What did it cost less?

BENNETT: Oh, yes. It wasn't as showy a place but they certainly put on the pictures. (laughs)

JL: Well, you said with a coupon it cost 50¢ to sit in the balcony at the Varieties.

BENNETT: No, that was at the Grand.

JL: At the Grand?

BENNETT: /The matinees at the Grand were where the coupons came into the picture. It started about 1910, I think, when the Wright Huntington Stock Company came to Terre Haute for the winter. They lived at the Filbeck Hotel at 5th and Cherry and other residence hotels. They gave two plays a week, starting on Sunday (matinee and night) and changed plays on Wednesday. It was then that coupons were printed in the newspapers to be used at the Wednesday matinees, so that housewives could come to the matinee and get home (by street-car) to get supper. But I don't recall whether coupons were used otherwise./

JL: How much did it cost to go to the Varieties?

BENNETT: Oh, I don't remember. I think a matinee was 25 cents. Night I believe was 75 or a dollar. (laughs) Something like that.

JL: Did most people go to these performances by . . . on the streetcars?

BENNETT: Oh, yes. Uh-huh. There was no other way.  
(laughs)

JL: Well, I guess they could have taken a horse  
and buggy, couldn't they?

BENNETT: Well, a lot of people drove in from the country  
and would go to a livery stable and walk down to  
where they were going, you see, to the theater. No,  
there was a great of that.

JL: What do you recall about the Hippodrome?

BENNETT: Well, it came on in 1915. And it was a fine  
playhouse, too. It was . . . there was vaudeville  
there but mainly, pictures. It came . . . well,  
there . . . it had a great deal of vaudeville.  
But I don't remember . . . it was right at the time  
after my father died and we had moved out to the  
country. And the getting around to things that way  
wasn't easy. Things had changed in our whole setup.  
And so, it was not easy. At that time we were  
living out in the country and I saw very few per-  
formances at the Hippodrome. But I was acquainted  
with the others. That is, I had seen them earlier  
and I was more acquainted with them.

JL: Do you remember some of the acts you saw at  
Varieties and the Lyric?

BENNETT: Yes. There was one that I always enjoyed  
hugely. It was the Wilton sisters.

JL: Now they were local, weren't they?

BENNETT: They were local girls -- Mae and Rose. Their  
mother, as I recall, had been an actress and she  
trained these girls. They were talented in dancing  
and singing and they were good little musicians.  
She trained them and got them ready to be stage  
performers which they did. And their act was always

BENNETT: built on much the same lines as they grew older -- as they matured I'll say and their voices matured. Mae had been quite a serious student of voice, and she had a beautiful voice and she sang nice songs, very lovely songs. Rose was a little, dark-eyed, curly-headed girl who just had tap dancing right in her feet. She played the violin. Everything she did was rather on the comedy side. It always was that. And she always -- no matter how many years it took -- the last thing that she would do on her violin was (sings) do doodle do doot, doot do and slap her foot down on the last note. Always. (laughs) From the time they were children 'til the last time I ever saw them at the Varieties, she still was ending that way, you know. But they were good. They were very good. And a very refined program. It was always . . . you could count on it being a refined thing. Their dresses were so pretty and they were pretty and their act was nice and it was nice.

JL: Well, I was just looking at my notes here because I remember in a previous conversation you were talking about having visited someone who went on to achieve fame, or having seen a performance on an upper floor . . . a place above a store. Who was that?

BENNETT: (laughs) Oh, that was the Wilton girls!

JL: Oh, that was the Wilton sisters?

BENNETT: Yes, that was down at 17th and Hulman and Mr. Mahan -- back to Mr. Mahan -- had built the brick building on the northwest corner of 17th and Hulman and it's there to this day, a very well built brick building.

And the upper floor at that time was rented to the Red Man Lodge, Red Man. It was a lodge,

BENNETT: you know. And once in a while -- at least once in a year -- they would give an entertainment and have a box supper and everything that way. The Wilton girls were just starting out with the training their mother was giving them and they were putting on just such a program as they developed that way. Mae was singing a serious, pretty song in her child voice, doing it well, and Rose was doing her comedy bit and slapping her foot at the end of it, you know. And so they were on the program there. I played on the program and my brother, Jess, sang and he played the violin and all and the Wilton girls were on. It was just people in the neighborhood that put on that program. Oddly, the Wilton girls were cousins of Wilton Browne, who was the president of the Rose Glee Club when they won the Intercollegiate meet over at Indianapolis. They all came from, I believe, Staunton.

JL: That's when your husband Clyde was the director?

BENNETT: Yes. Uh-huh. I think that . . . I think they came from Staunton. I think his mother had been a Wilton and she named him Wilton Browne, b-r-o-w-n-e. He graduated that same year.

JL: In addition to the vaudeville shows, what other kinds of performances did you see in Terre Haute in those days? Did you go to circuses?

BENNETT: Oh, yes!

JL: Did circus trains come to town?

BENNETT: Yes. Indeed they did.

JL: Did you go to the train station sometimes to see the animals?

BENNETT: I never got to do that. My brothers did. Little girls didn't get to take in things like that but the boys would go. And the show grounds about that time were out at 25th and Wabash.

JL: Where the stadium is now.

BENNETT: No.

JL: No?

BENNETT: No, see the . . .

JL: No, that's Brown /Avenue7. That would be where K-Mart and all that is.

BENNETT: Yes. It's now . . . you see there was the Rose Home which now is K-Mart and this was directly south on the southeast corner. And it was just . . .

JL: At 25th and Wabash.

BENNETT: Uh-huh. And it was a big wheat field.

JL: What circuses came to Terre Haute?

BENNETT: Oh, Barnum & Bailey and Ringling Brothers and then there were lesser circuses which were good circuses. They came. And then the Elks . . . I think it was the Elks and the Shrine; you know, they have their circuses and all those . . . it's been going on quite a while. But the two big circuses always played in Terre Haute.

And I'd get to see the parade. Mom and I would go very sedately up on the streetcar and stand on Wabash Avenue and get to see the parade come along you know.

JL: Prior to the circus?

BENNETT: Uh-huh. And then they would go on out to 25th Street and we did get to see the circus. We went on out, had seats in the tent. They were fine. We had good seats.

JL: We talked earlier about the black community in Terre Haute, especially when you were in school. I know one of our oral history narrators mentioned the separate drinking fountains and the fact that when he was working in the Terre Haute House and performing there, he had to enter by the back door. That was just the way it was.

BENNETT: Uh-huh.

JL: I know in the Indiana theater there is still a screen up in the seats -- kind of a screened off section -- and I just learned recently that that had been for the black community here in Terre Haute at one time. I wondered if you remember it being . . .

BENNETT: No. I just remember that such a condition existed. It was just something you took for granted. In my mind at least, there was no question of right or wrong because in my home we were not allowed to have feelings against the blacks. My father was English and my mother, it was like it was with the hoboes and all. It was a human being needing help or understanding.

END OF TAPE 2

TAPE 3

JL: Mrs. Bennett, was there a caste system, so to speak, when you went to the theater? In other words, was there a social clique that sort of stayed in one little area and then the rest of you . . .

BENNETT: (chuckles) Well, you find that everywhere.

BENNETT. You find it even in the churches. But the Grand had box seats and the Indiana had box seats and, of course, the charge was a little more than the seats on the first floor and they were sort of preferred and /used by/ people who could afford /to use/ them. And they . . . really, I didn't like the first floor as I did the balcony. The balcony was . . . you could look down on the stage. There was no one in your way. On the first floor a lady with a big hat sat right in front of you and I was little, I was short, and I had to dodge that hat and it was just . . . well, the pleasure of being there was spoiled. But go up in the balcony, you could see everything. I loved to watch the orchestra as much as I did the actors. I just loved to see them turn their music and the things they did. And this goes, too. There was a . . . Mr. Bryant told me once that . . . he said, "As I think back, I marvel at the skill of our players in these orchestras. An act could come in and maybe they'd been delayed on the road and there'd be no chance to rehearse. None whatever." And he said, "The act would come on and we would play from the music without ever having been able to see what the music was first. We never missed a beat. Of course, they were trained and they were earnest and they were" . . . you know, "good musicians. But," he said, "I think back now, ooh, it makes my blood run cold to think of some of the risks we had to run and yet we always came through well."

Well, in the balcony . . . not the . . . the gallery in the Grand, I was up there just once and that was when Galli-Curci came -- the great Italian coloratura - and the house was just sold out and I had to come from my teaching and there was nothing left but the gallery. So a girl friend and I who were both teaching went and went up in the gallery. It was so steep, so far up it was just dizzying to sit up there. A lot of Italians



BENNETT: were sitting there, all turned out you know to hear Galli-Curci. And they'd all had garlic for supper. (laughs) That was the big thing I could notice. There was one big Italian who sat by me and he made a megaphone of his program. And when she came back for encores, you know, people were just applauding wildly, and he shouted through this megaphone that he'd devised there. He said, "Lady, please sing 'The Wren'!" and his voice just boomed. Of course, "The Wren" was one of her famous songs and had little trills and all in order to imitate a wren singing. So she did. She sang "The Wren" for him. And, oooh, he was happy. I tell you he was so happy. He clapped his hands 'til I thought his hands would drop off. I enjoyed that very much that way, just to see the enthusiasm that they had, their appreciation of music. They understood. They understood everything about it.

JL: Who were some of the other performers who came to the Grand?

BENNETT: Oh, we had the best! Madame Schumann-Heink, /Fritz/ Kreisler, the great violinist, /Efrem/ Zimbalist, the great violinist. Oh (pause) Oh, dear . . . I can just see him but I can't think of his name. /Rachmaninoff, Harold Bauer, Paderewski (famous pianists, among others I can't recall easily); singers Rosa Ponselle, John Charles Thomas, Frances Alda, Geraldine Farrar, Alma Gluck, John McCormack, Luisa Tetrazzini, Reinald Werrenrath, Evan Williams; violinist Jascha Heifetz -- oh, there were so many that I can't recall. In operas, I recall performances of Otello and Madame Butterfly, though I know there were others. And for years, Thanksgiving day brought Al G. Fields' Minstrels to the Grand! We had the best obtainable! But Casals, the great cellist, and there was a harpist, a fine harpist, I can't think of his name now. They all /recorded for/ the fine /Red Sea/ Victor records for the victrola.

JL: Now were there local orchestras accompanying them?

BENNETT: No.

JL: They brought their own /orchestras/ or what?

BENNETT: No. They had their . . . whatever they did there. The singers had their own accompaniment with them, see.

JL: What about some of the more famous acts that came to the Varieties and the Lyric? What are those you remember?

BENNETT: Well, I . . . there were none that I remember specifically. They were just fine vaudeville, five acts of good vaudeville.

JL: What happened if an act didn't show up or a train broke /down or/ a train was delayed and an act couldn't get there? Did the orchestra just fill in or did you ever see a local performer come up from the audience and take . . .

BENNETT: Well, no. I don't know. I never experienced that and I couldn't answer the question. Now they might possibly have had something in reserve because it would only be wisdom to do that. Every program should have something in reserve that can be counted on to fill in if something happens. The only . . . the nearest to that was two or three acts that I saw in which they came on stage wearing the clothes they had been traveling in because the trunks had not arrived. They would always explain it, not apologetically; they would always just say that our trunks have not got in and if you can put up with us, we'll give you our act. And they would be dressed in shirtwaists and skirts and a business suit and all like that, but there was always an informality due to that

BENNETT: that made it always very good. The audience was always in deep sympathy with them, you know. And they would just applaude to the echo because they were so brave to come on without all their pretty clothes.

JL: Do you ever remember having attended a performance that was not very popular as far as the audience was concerned, and there might have been some booing? Did that ever happen?

BENNETT: Oooh, yes. I remember two or three acts that way but it was never the fault of the act. Usually it was some boor down in the audience /who/ had no better manners.

JL: Did the ushers take care of them in good order?

BENNETT: A lot of times, yes, yes. Sometimes they hustled them out.

And then there were people who just delighted in heckling, just heckling an actor, you know, from his seat. He'd just call ugly remarks or /insults/ or something. And there'd be no reason for it or anything. But the actors as a rule, knew how to handle it. That is they didn't let it get them down. The audience was all with the act. The ushers would come and get hold of them and take them out but that's . . . it never was the fault of the act that ever I /knew of/.

JL: I understand that the Indiana theater . . . the grand opening was a real spectacular and I know that it was designed after the region in southern Spain that is known as Andalusia, a certain architectural design. I wonder if you remember anything distinctive about the interiors of the Hippodrome or the Varieties or the Lyric. What was it like? What were the colors they used?

BENNETT: Well, I don't remember specifically. I think the walls and ceilings were possibly a cream color or something like that, something rather light but not glaring, not white, you know. It would be like cream, and they would have velvet seats. Later I think they went from velvet to leather, nice leather seats. As a rule, they were red velvet, red leather and . . .

JL: They were considered plush inside?

BENNETT: Um hm. Yes. And they were pretty. The boxes were carried out in the same scheme. They would, say, have red velvet seats in them, the chairs, you know, and the curtains would be red velvet curtains, and the box itself would be a swelling front and ornamented and as a rule carried out in ivory or cream. And they were pretty much on a pattern.

JL: What about refreshments? I take it there wasn't a popcorn machine in the lobby. Or was there?

BENNETT: Well, sometimes there were.

JL: Really?

BENNETT: Yes.

JL: And cokes? Or what was the drink of the day in those days?

BENNETT: No. I don't think. Pop was the popular drink of any soft drink, but I don't remember any machines for them. There were popcorn stands.

JL: And you say pop to drink?

BENNETT: Uh-huh.

JL: Well, how is that different from coke?

- BENNETT: Well, coke (laughs) . . . coke is glorified pop I'd say. The pop was a sort of basic carbonated drink. It was white or clear, you know, in a pale green bottle and it . . .
- JL: Was it pretty "bitey?"
- BENNETT: Yes.
- JL: I heard that.
- BENNETT: I never cared for it. But I don't recall . . . now later there were coke stands that were brought in. The Grand . . . even the Grand in the lobby had coke, you know, there. But that was later.
- JL: Well, I take it that Terre Haute must have been bustling after an evening of theater. That people . . . you say there was the Greek Candy Kitchen; were there other places . . . you know, restaurants that were popular?
- BENNETT: Oh, yes. Uh-huh. I'll tell you one of the very nicest was cat-a-cornered from the Grand in the Rose Dispensary building. Now that was back about 1908, along there. They had a few tables, probably five or six tables, with curly legs, you know, that same kind but they served the nicest little suppers, little . . . dainty little sandwiches and potato salad and you could get chocolate with whipped cream and cake and ice cream. They were just lovely. And it was just a treat to go after the show . . . go and get a little supper afterwards. And the Greek Candy Kitchens were nice. There was one, it would be the second door, I think, west of 7th Street on the north side, you know, on the northwest corner. I believe that it was Con Herber's drugstore that was on the corner. Next to him was the Greek Candy Kitchen and it was operated by a man by the name of Georgeopolous. And they were candymakers. They seemed to excel in candy and things of that kind

BENNETT: and, of course, ice cream of all kinds and sodas and everything that way. The room was mirrored all around, just all around. All four sides were mirrors. You could see the whole room at a glance, you know. They were pretty and the lights were pretty, and the men who served you and did the work there were all in nice white uniforms and it was always nice.

Then there was another large one down west of 5th Street on the south side. It was Greek, too. It's odd that this . . . this first one was run by people by the name of Georgeopolous. And at Mount Carmel, Illinois, where my brother, Seth, lived -- he and his family -- there was a candy kitchen built on the very same /order/, all the mirrors around, and their name was Ginopoulos, g-i-n-o-p-o-u-l-o-u-s, Ginopoulous, and this was Georgeopolous. I think his name was George. Georgeopolous.

JL: It would be George and then o-p, op, o-l-i-s?

BENNETT: Let's see. /G-e-o-r-g-e-o-p-o-l-o-u-s./

JL: Well, I wasn't close, was I? (both laugh)

BENNETT: George -- I think his name was George -- George Georgeopolous. The other was Bill, Bill Ginos, G-i-n-o-s. And then . . . let's see. There was Bill Ginos and then there was a Ginopoulos in the same firm. And it was the same, nice white suits and everything clean and nice candy and all kinds of confections.

JL: I'm curious. Since we're on the subject of food and going out to dinner after the theater . . . today one might think a really good meal might be a nice piece of prime rib and a baked potato and a salad or some sort of steak or maybe shrimp.

JL: What would have been the ideal meal back in 1908 in Terre Haute if you were going out to dinner in downtown Terre Haute? What would have been your entree?

BENNETT: Well, uh-huh . . . well, I don't know because I didn't experience some of those things. That was for the wealthy group.

JL: So really not everyone had that luxury?

BENNETT: No, if they . . . they could get it if they had the money. You see, you can't realize now . . . you just can't realize how money . . . how the lack of it kept . . . it was the only thing that kept people from enjoying many, many things like that. And I have read . . . I would read avidly stories that dealt with after-theater suppers and all. I just loved to read. They'd have lobster newburgh and I to {commences to laugh} this day don't know what lobster newburgh is like!

JL: (joins in laughter) I'm going to fix that for you some day.

BENNETT: Sometime I must have lobster newburgh. (both laugh)

But there were just things that way. They went in for shaded lights on the tables. They were . . . it was always pretty. White linen, you know, and . . .

JL: Well, what were some of those restaurants on Wabash Avenue that were a little too expensive for most people?

BENNETT: Well, there was a Thompson's Restaurant on the south side of Wabash near 6th Street which was very nice. And, of course, the hotels. You see the hotels had very nice service that way. Herz and Root's had tearooms.

JL: Now were those only open during the day?

BENNETT: Yes. They closed when the elevator stopped going up and down at 5 o'clock.

JL: Was that something that you could do after a matinee performance?

BENNETT: No. No. It was done there.

JL: Did you go?

BENNETT: Oh, after a matinee you could, yes. They could serve lunch and . . . /serve/ you all through the afternoon but they closed with the store.

JL: Did you ever go to Herz or Root's for lunch?

BENNETT: Um hm. Yes, I've eaten there.

JL: What was it like?

BENNETT: Well, just like any nice restaurant. You ordered from the menu what they had and their food was very nice.

JL: Did they ever have style shows during the lunches like they do in big cities today?

BENNETT: Well, I believe they did along toward the last. When Herz's had a 50-Year . . . when they celebrated their fiftieth anniversary of being a store, they put on a whole week of entertainment, a whole week. And it cost! I didn't get to go at all, but they had local talent and talent that was brought in. Paige's furnished a fine grand piano for the musicians. And I remember Eugenia Hubbard Honeywell ( she was Eugenia Hubbard then and she was one of Miss Hulman's star pupils and a very brilliant performer) and she gave a number -- it was a Chopin waltz -- and she was very



BENNETT: picturesque. She was just a natural, you know, at performing that way. I remember that she was on the program. I read about it avidly the next day because I couldn't go, but, oh, I did enjoy it. And it was Anna Bowles Wiley, the reporter /for/ the paper, who wrote these things up. And, oh, but she wrote colorfully. It was . . . you know, she certainly had adjectives. And then they imported some acts, too. They brought Henry Burr and the Silvertone /Trio/ from Chicago. They sang on the Victor records and were . . . oh, what did they represent in Chicago? I can't think right now. /They represented Sears, Roebuck & Co., sponsors of the Silvertone Hour./ But they /sang/ favorites . . . nice popular music and standard songs. They had nice voices and it was a /trio/, a male /trio/. They came and they /wore/ dress suits. And, oh, people told me about it. "Oh," they said, "Henry Burr just . . . he was just a picture in his dress suit. And he breathed so easily. You never saw him take a breath."  
(laughs)

JL: And this was all staged up in that tearoom at Herz?

BENNETT: Yes. Uh-huh. They had a stage you know and . . .

JL: Now what year was that?

BENNETT: Well, I couldn't say. It was probably in the '20s because I was teaching. That's why I couldn't go and see it. I was teaching and that would be in the '20s.

JL: Herz is what became Alden's?

BENNETT: Um hm.

JL: And then has since been torn down. I can barely remember Alden's but I can remember Root's much better.

JL:                   Where was the tearoom at Root's?

BENNETT:            I think it was /on/ the fourth floor. I think it was /on/ the fourth floor in both buildings, Root's and /Herz/.

JL:                   What did it cost to go to lunch at one of those tearooms?

BENNETT:            Oh, it was nominal. You ordered what you wanted.

JL:                   But could you have a nice lunch for a dollar or was that . . .

BENNETT:            It would come nearer to being 75 cents. And then there were a lot of little places. Now, /in/ Root's basement, they had much pretty china and glassware down there and lamps, lamps with pretty shades. They were for sale, you know, but it was a display of them.

Well, they had a counter there that served ice cream, /dainty refreshments/ and things that way; always a big coffee urn going and you could smell the coffee. And they made up dainty little sandwiches. You could get a piece of pie. And, oh, the ladies who shopped made for Root's basement before they went home and had a bite to eat there, you know. It was nice, very nice.

JL:                   Do you remember when that closed down? When the food services in Root's closed down?

BENNETT:            Well, I could hardly say now. It must have been . . .

JL:                   'Cause I don't remember it in my lifetime.

BENNETT:            Well, no. I think that probably the Depression

BENNETT: had a lot to do with doing away with those things, just a lot. They couldn't keep going. People couldn't afford to do these extra things, you see, and I think that they just died out about that time. They put other things . . . took the lamps out and put furniture down there and you know . . .

JL: Of course, in those days the dime stores . . . Kresge's was kind of a "going" place, wasn't it?

BENNETT: It certainly was!

JL: It had wonderful pie.

BENNETT: Yes, they did. They had a cook there who was the pie baker was a neighbor of ours out on East Hulman Street, Hattie House /later Rich/. She certainly knew how to make pie, and that was her job at /Kresges . . . there on the alley./ It was just lovely.

The stores had food counters there. They were nice.

JL: Well, I sort of got sidetracked on our discussion on vaudeville by /the subject of/ food, which is my weakness, so we'll get back.

I've got some names here. /Now/ you've discussed the Wilton sisters and I'm going to mention some /other/ names and wonder what you remember about these people, if you remember anything?

Rose Melville?

BENNETT: No, I never knew her. She was before my time. But Rose Melville and . . . oh, do you have another name in there?

JL: Alice Fisher Harcourt?

BENNETT: Well, now that was . . . Juliet Peddle could have told you about Alice Fisher Harcourt.

JL: She went on to achieve some fame in Broadway.

BENNETT: Yes.

JL: I've got Valeska Surratt [pronounced Sur-aw'].

BENNETT: Yes, now she and Rose Melville as I recall were cousins, or relatives, of this Mr. Lee who was the herb doctor who cured my mother's felon that way. Smock, I think Rose Melville was Rose Smock and Melville was her stage name. But her real name was Smock.

JL: Did you ever see them perform?

BENNETT: No. No. They were before my time. They probably . . . they were performing when I was a child . . . a little girl but I never saw them.

JL: I didn't have any dates on these [performers] so when I . . . just made note of the names. I wasn't sure when they had performed.

Skeets Gallagher?

BENNETT: Well, he was a little later. And he was in vaudeville.

JL: Did you ever see . . . you didn't see him perform in Terre Haute?

BENNETT: I think I did. I think I did. He was an expert dancer, you know, and songs and had a . . . I think he may have had a partner. I couldn't say, but he would have been in that group.

JL: And then, of course, Ernestine Myers Morrissey.

BENNETT: Um hm.

JL: You would have seen her?

BENNETT: I may . . . no, I never saw Ernestine /perform/. I've seen some of her pupils but again, when she was, you know, doing these things, I was engaged in my work. That has kept me from seeing many things that were out at that time.

JL: How about Emma Klatte and Diane Hyland, who were known as the King Sisters?

BENNETT: Uh-huh. Well, it was the same; I never saw them /perform/.

JL: Um hm.

We were talking one time and you mentioned Young's Garden. Now, was that also known as the Airdome?

BENNETT: Yes.

JL: What was your recollection of that?

BENNETT: Well, Young's Garden Airdome was a big tent. It was at 5th and Cherry, along in there, and they gave . . . they had the summer theater. The theaters closed for the summer. It would be hot and the fans were those ceiling fans, you know, revolving.

JL: So really too hot for . . .

BENNETT: Yes. For comfort and the actors had to learn new programs. They had to learn new acts for next year, you know. /Theaters also used this time to redecorate./

So this . . . his name was Young. I believe his name was Steve. I'm not sure but that seems to me that it was. It was a big tent, and they had a stage and they had a little pit there where

BENNETT: they could have a pianist and a violinist and drummer, you know, and all. And they put on plays and program material, you know. It was a favorite kind of place to go in the summer because it was cool.

JL: Um hm.

BENNETT: You could see a play and it was cool. That was nice.

JL: Well now, vaudeville began to decline what . . . in the 1930s was it?

BENNETT: Well, I suppose so.

JL: Do you think the Depression had a big part in that or do you think the talkies coming in . . .

BENNETT: Yes, both. The Depression, of course, influenced everything that had to give up. And the talkies coming in just . . . well, I tell you, these fine theater orchestras that we had were just gone overnight because The Desert Song had come in, say, in 1926 with, as they called it, canned music, all the fine orchestral music and dialog, everything that way. And it just . . . well, it just shut everything down that way. Yet it was just a shame. These people had worked hard. They were talented. They had put everything they had in their work. And the work was just gone overnight because the talkies had taken the place of it. And it /the talkies/ had its own music with it. That's where the term "canned music" came in.

JL: How did the local people feel about it? Were they . . .

BENNETT: They felt both ways. It was curiosity and interest that took them. We all loved The Desert Song and it was a big production, bigger than they

BENNETT: could bring to put on our stage, don't you see. And we could enjoy every angle of it. But everyone regretted the loss of our live musicians because people liked to watch the people play. They loved to watch them as well as to hear them. And so it was mixed emotions certainly. But the play . . . the canned music and all won out. They just were there to stay.

JL: Well, what about dance halls? Did you ever have a chance . . . did you ever have time away from your teaching or studying music to go, for example, to the Trianon?

BENNETT: No, I never did.

JL: Or to any of the various dance halls because I understand they were very popular?

BENNETT: Yes, they were.

No, I never . . . dancing never came my way.

JL: So you don't really know too much about the people who . . .

BENNETT: No, I really don't. The few fellows that I went with were not dancers and they were not interested in going to a dance hall so I . . . That wasn't . . .

JL: Were the Reliance and the Reliable still on the Wabash during your time?

BENNETT: Um hm. Yes, they were there. I believe the last time I was on one of those boats was along about 1914. And they were quite a popular thing in the summer. You could take a nice boat ride up to Fort Harrison. Then the boat swung around and brought you back to the dock at Wabash Avenue or Ohio Street.

JL: Did they serve dinner on it or was it just  
. . . .

BENNETT: No. No. I think as I remember it, there was popcorn and pop, again you know, /or/ some kind of soft drink that you could buy.

And there was a man here by the name of Chris Stark, who played the piano on one of those boats for the dancers. In fact, Chris Stark had been a pupil of Mr. Leibing, Professor Leibing, and . . .

JL: He was a private teacher?

BENNETT: Um hm.

JL: In Terre Haute. I think you mentioned him earlier in the interview.

We'll go on to the subject of local amateur music and theater groups. Did you ever hear of the Hoosier Ensemble?

BENNETT: Oh, yes!

JL: Can you tell us what they did?

BENNETT: Um hm. It was organized by a Mrs. Daisy Robinson, who was a cellist. And they . . . it was a small group. Let's see. What is the name of it?

JL: Hoosier Ensemble.

BENNETT. Hoosier Ensemble. They had a singer, Bessie Streever Meyer, who sang, and there was the pianist and violinist -- or two violins I believe -- and Mrs. Robinson played the cello. I think that was it. Then there was another /group/. There was the Ulmer Trio which was /of/ the same caliber. They played for dinners and entertainment. They would



BENNETT: say, entertainment will be furnished by the Hoosier Ensemble or the Ulmer Trio, you know. They particularly played dinner music, even at the hotels /and were quite in demand for several years/. They played that way. /I recall Mrs. Ulmer, cellist; Helen Vendel, soprano; Rebecca Varney, violinist; Elizabeth Miller, violinist, Elizabeth Blood, pianist; Margaret Bear, pianist; and Ruth Patton, pianist, as some of the participants in these groups./

JL: I also know that in 1949 there was something here called The Municipal Musicals. Did you ever attend one of those performances?

BENNETT: Yes. They put on very nice performances of musical shows. In fact, Jackie Hughes, Mrs. Jack Hughes, had sung . . . she had the lead in Desert Song and Rose Marie and Blossom Time. They were all good musical shows and were beautifully directed. They had an excellent director.

JL: About how long did those shows go on in Terre Haute . . . about how many years?

BENNETT: Well, not over two or three years as I recall.

JL: Did something take their place?

BENNETT: Oh, I don't know. I couldn't say. They were very demanding in the rehearsal and all like that and it was hard work really. They put on some very good performances, just very good.

JL: I'm curious. Having taught this many years, you certainly have seen some changes in the attitudes of your students from when you began teaching. What effects have such things as rock and roll in the '50s and punk rock today or television or automobiles or an overabundance of extracurricular activities, what has that done to the attitude of a music student?

BENNETT: Well, there for a while . . . now after the Depression radio had come in. And people would have a little radio if they couldn't buy bread. And it took the place of young people taking music lessons. They just went radio wild. And the piano became something that they stacked magazines on and so forth. And it went on that way. They just simply . . . well, it just did away with serious study. The young people didn't care to /study music/. They wanted to listen to the radio. And . . .

JL: Now that was right after the Depression?

BENNETT: Um hm. And /during/ World War II the government issued an edict that they were not going to manufacture more pianos, that the material was to be used in the war effort. And just like spoiled children, people /said/ right now, "I want my child to have piano. I want my child to have music. I never had music and my child must have music." And the pianos were hauled out and tuned and the dust was wiped off of them and people . . .

JL: (laughs) People need a little pain, don't they?

BENNETT: Yes. And then they began, you know, hunting teachers. Well, the thing was it was an entirely new group of children that had come on. The permissiveness had come into everything and the children wouldn't count /time/. There was no . . . you couldn't have the influence on them. If they didn't want to do a thing, they wouldn't do it. If they didn't like the piece, they wouldn't learn it. You know it was just that. And the teachers had to just simply reorganize their thinking and everything.

Miss Hulman and I discussed that a great deal and she told me, she said, "I tell you," (and this

BENNETT: is odd for anyone who knew Miss Hulman) "It has brought me out of my ivory tower. The children rule now." She just had her students who were advanced and matured; /they/ were married and moved away, you know, into other things /to make a living/. Suddenly her class was just denuded of those that had been the fine class. It was the same with Miss Alden /and Miss Meyer/.

JL: I suppose the potential was there but the attitude /had/ changed . . .

BENNETT: Oh, yes, the potential was always there. But it was just a different . . . a different thing entirely.

Then after a while . . . now I had to continue. I had to make my living and that was the way I had to make my living. And I had to deal with it. I couldn't just close my eyes to it. So it forced me to . . . well, to work in ways that I could get a result no matter what.

JL: What was some of your strategy?

BENNETT: Well, it wasn't strategy particularly. It was to find other ways of presenting the same thing which is the basis. The basis always has to be. And I had to find different ways of presenting it to make it agreeable, as nearly as I could. And I got along pretty well with it. It wasn't always successful, but I will say that after a time, probably 10 or 15 years, the . . . oh, in the schools they began having these contests, you see, and that helped very much to bring the /to the/ attention of parents and children that there had to be certain pieces learned and that the child could not win the contest if he didn't do it well. And so I worked on that basis there.

JL: Does that attitude pretty much exist today?

BENNETT: Well, to some extent. The young people today are much more amenable to learning to play well, much more.

JL: What do you think has renewed the interest?

BENNETT: Oh, I think it's just run its course.

JL: Kind of cyclical then, people go through . . .

BENNETT: Yes. Uh-huh.

JL: Do your students still appreciate the classics and are they still willing to master the technique?

BENNETT: Um hm. I don't have too much trouble that way. The thing is they don't care to have recitals. They hate recitals. They don't want anything like that and if you have a recital, you have to . . . if it's going to be a good program, there must be a lot of nice drilling in everything -- in their performance, in their manners and how to get to the piano and get away from it, just as it was for the Rose Glee Club that time. It was their stance coming and going and all that made Mr. McCutcheon give them first place. He said, "They went on the stage like men. They sang like men. I could understand every word." It was just detail, nice detail. And that . . . that's getting better all the time. It's the way they're approached about it. You certainly don't want to humiliate them or make fun of them or anything like that. I try to make myself their friend, a part of the picture, you know, and I tell them about this episode with the Rose Glee Club and all and they listen with all their ears and so they're easier to work with. But it's not like the old way of teaching where you assigned a lesson and they had to go home and practice.

JL: Now you kind of have to make an appeal.  
(laughs)

BENNETT: Yes, you do. Certainly. Um hm.

JL: I'm going to shift back for the last part of our talk to the downtown area. I want to know your feelings about it today. What hopes do you see for the planned changes for downtown Terre Haute and how do you feel about the leveling of a good many of the /old/ buildings?

BENNETT: Well, I'm like a lot of the other people, I hate to see many of our nice buildings put out of existence. I think they . . . I do think there has been a great waste of material in many of the buildings that have been wrecked. I feel they could have been made into, as we would say, homes for old people or, you know, various things that way. And we need a good downtown hotel. The motels don't serve all purposes . . . if there are conferences and all in town. But at the present there doesn't seem to be anything to do about it, just not at all. I hate to see the contour of things change so radically. I feel now this matter of having to drive up Cherry Street in order to reach the river bridge, that it might be a little on the picturesque side. But to me, that straight line of the Old National Road that went through Terre Haute, the crossroads of the world . . . . We were the crossroads of this country, you know. It /Old National Road/ went straight through. And the bridge was a part of it. You just went straight across the bridge. And things like that have been eliminated in many of these changes; they don't mean a thing to the people who are doing the changing. They just have a different plan in mind and that's that. But I hate to see many of the things go.

JL: Of course, one of the nice things that's helping is that there seems to be a real renewed interest in the history of Terre Haute and one of the /current/ projects is this oral history project.

JL: I think people are becoming more aware of our heritage.

Do you think that the downtown will ever be lively, the booming spot it once was?

BENNETT: Oh, I couldn't say. (laughs) I just don't know.

There's been so much building away from town . . . out, you know, along the highway. The businesses are way out, the dentist way out, you might say, in the woods, you know, and all. There's so much of that now, where it /downtown/ used to be such a community. You knew just /where every-thing was located/. You could walk anywhere, /if you had to. There was a level kind of stability that filled the atmosphere/.

JL: Of course, the highway -- Interstate 70 -- has had something to do with that.

BENNETT: Yes. But they . . . I like to see them a little more consolidated. If you're going to go to town, it's nice to be able to take in several things right where you are.

JL: Um hm.

END OF SIDE 1

TAPE 3-SIDE 2

JL: Mrs. Bennett, do you think that Terre Haute is still a good place to live and if so . . . or if not, why?

BENNETT: Oh, I think it is! (laughs) I think Terre Haute is always a good place to live! I've always felt that Terre Haute is a big little town. Now some small towns are small big towns and they're

BENNETT: snobbish and, you know, /there's/ a lot of class distinction and all. But Terre Haute has always been an easy place to live. You could live as expensively or as frugally as you cared to or as your pocketbook would permit. And it doesn't matter. It just doesn't matter. I've always felt it's really a friendly place. It has always been a friendly place. And it's like with the matter of, oh, just a number of things. It seems to grow . . . let's see. It seems to always come back to around 60,000. It was 60,000 quite a while ago, you know. And then it would go up to 70,000 or maybe up around 80,000. All of a sudden we're back between 60,000 and 70,000. It just seems to be, and it isn't anything to regret. It's just the . . . say a business leaves or something that way and we're right back on the same old, good old territory. Our feet are on sort of solid ground, and I think Terre Haute is a dandy place.

And it always delights me when I've talked with people who have come here with big businesses like Pillsbury and all like that. I've taught their children, and we discuss these things. And they'll say, "I like Terre Haute. We like it. Now, we have to move. We have to go some other place, but as soon as my husband retires, we're coming back to Terre Haute. We like Terre Haute."

It's easy to live here. It's rather leisurely, you know, it's rather a leisurely place. Always has been. It makes you think of a busy little bee. (laughs) But it's rather leisurely and the . . . well, I think Terre Haute is just O.K. And I always have! (laughs heartily)

JL: Well, I thank you very, very much for a delightful conversation.

BENNETT: Well, I'm so glad to have discussed these things. And as we've talked along, I've thought,

BENNETT: oh, there is so much that is rich in our heritage that we have not touched on at all, not in the least. I'm sorry there were so many people. There were people in the teaching profession and all that. There is no chance to mention them and to give credit which I would love to do. And it's . . . we'd just have to make tape after tape after tape. But some of these days, we can.

BENNETT  
and JL: (simultaneously) We can add to it.

BENNETT: Yes. (laughs) I should say, but this has been nice. I've enjoyed every minute.

JL: Thank you.

END OF TAPE 3



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